

Winter
club



Hunter Club - Chapter 01-10

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Chapter 1

1# (No talent)

“Ughhh!” (TLN: ㅍ으응, sound you make when you are in pain)

His head hurt as if was about to explode. Noguduk moaned loudly, while he was half asleep and half awake. As his five senses started waking up, he started to realize one or two people were making a commotion.

“Oh my! I think this uncle is awake!”

The first thing he heard was the flighty voice of a young woman.

“Ha. If he was still dreaming after 30 minute then I would have been able to wake him up with a slap to the face.”

He heard a rough voice of a man, who sounded like he had heard something he didn't like. Next, the voice of a young woman was heard arguing with him.

“How can you speak that way towards an elder?”

“Jeez. Age isn't a government office... You want to argue about age even here? Anyways, why isn't this young man getting up?(TLN: there are two people unconscious) The deadline isn't too far off. I have no choice. I'll wake him up even if I have to beat him.”

“Wait.... Ah! This person is also waking up!”

He couldn't hear clearly, but he could tell there were several people bustling about. Noguduk slowly calmed him breathing, and he carefully opened his closed eyes. His blurry vision started to pick up the outline of the people bustling about. In front of him, he could see a young man and a woman approaching him. Nokguduk's head was in disarray, so he couldn't afford to pay attention to them.

Where is this place? Why am I here? Who are they? He didn't have a single answer to these question.

‘Where is this? Is it the hospital? I'm sure... Wasn't I hit by a car...?’

Like any other day, he had purchased soju and dried squid before he headed

towards his house. It was deep into the night so there weren't many cars on the road. It was his day off, and the live broadcast of the soccer team he liked was on during this time slot. While being a bit excited, he waited for the pedestrian lights to turn. When the signal turned green, he started crossing the crosswalk... Suddenly, his surrounding became bright and he heard the revving of a car engine right next to him. He turned his head in disbelief, but the bright headlight was already in front of his nose.

He knew he was about to die helplessly, so he closed his eyes tight. That was all he could remember. It wasn't a distance where he could avoid it. Considering the car was speeding like a raging bull, he would be half dead at the very least. However, his entire body was fine. Hands, feet, body... At the very least, there weren't any acute pain.

"Uncle, are you awake?"

"Ooh.. huh?"

A woman wearing a white blouse and tight jeans had woken Noguduk from his dreams. She looked young, and she seemed to be in her early 20s. By looking at how she was dressed, she seemed to be a college student.

He stared up blankly at her. No matter how he saw it, she wasn't a nurse. Neither was she a police woman or an employee from the insurance company. Any ways, he decided it would be better to get the answer from her rather than worrying about it by himself.

"Miss, where is this place? Is it the hospital? Did someone carry me here?"

"Pardon? What are you talking about? Didn't you come here after you listened to the explanation? "

On the contrary, the young woman questioned him back with incredulity in her eyes. At her unexpected reaction, Noguduk was also taken aback.

"Explanation? I haven't heard anything like that. I remember being almost hit by a car.... Any ways, where is this place?"

"Okay?"

Now her face was with ridiculousness as if she couldn't make heads or tail of

this situation. This caused the people, who were listening to their conversation, to have a similar expression as the woman. Then they started putting their two cents in.

“I told you. I said this uncle was strange. He is too old. He is a outsider unrelated to the test.”

“Oh my god. Is he really a outsider? Is that possible? Phew. No wonder, there seemed to be an extra person...”

“What will happen to this uncle? Soon, we’ll have to participate in the draft.... When the deadline passes, they said this room will disappear. Don’t we have to take him to the draft?”

“Are you crazy? What can that uncle do? Are you going to be responsible for him if he affects the grade?”

“How can you say that! If we don’t take this uncle, then he will die!”

“Stop. Let us stop. We shouldn’t be wasting our time right now.”

There was a light argument within the group, but a tall man acted as a mediator to settle it for the time being. The tall male was also in his early 20s like all the other people. He had on a blue dress shirt and a dark gray casual suit. His appearance gave him a sense of solemnity. Moreover, there was a luxurious silver glass perched on top of the bridge of his nose. This made him look like a typical white collar business elite.

“My name is Ha-taegyong.”

The man who claimed to be Ha-taegyong gathered Noguduk, and one other person who had also woken up recently. The others followed his orders without any complaints, so he must have implicitly taken up the role of leader.

He was surrounded by young men and young women, so Noguduk felt a little bit numb. He picked up the general mood of his surrounding, but he decided to ignore it for now. He decided to wait quietly for the man in front him to explain the whole story.

Ha-taegyong spoke to the man next to Noguduk first.

“Excuse me, but what is your name?”

“I’m Kim-jungin.”

The man, who had answered, had a calm face. Unlike Noguduk, he didn’t have any sense of confusion. Ha-taegyong saw Kim-jungin’s reaction and he lightly nodded his head.

“All right. Mr. Kim-jungin. Do you know about the draft and being a hunter?”

“Yes.”

In Ha-taegyong’s perspective, the short answer was satisfactory. He didn’t have to explain until his mouth hurt. The remaining problem was Noguduk, who was nervously looking back and forth between him and Kim-jungin.

“What is your name?”

“I’m called No..Noguduk... Where is this....?”

Ha-taegyong slid his glasses up to adjust it. Since he had temporarily become the leader, he had to make the primary decision on what to do with Noguduk. He didn’t know the detail as to why Noguduk was brought to this place, but once he had come to this place it was impossible for him to return. Therefore, the choice was to leave him or not. The answer was obvious.

‘We’ll take him’

This wasn’t his preference, but it was a decision based on the inclination of the group. Once the deadline passed, the ‘Ready Room’ would disappear. The living people, tools and the room would cease to exist. The people gathered here knew that Noguduk would die, but they weren’t cold-hearted enough to leave him behind. Maybe, only a small number would leave him behind.

Ha-taegyong gave an inscrutable sigh before speaking.

“I don’t have time to give a long explanation. In about 1 hour, this room will disappear. If Mr. Noguduk is still here then you have no choice but to die.”

“Wha..what! Die? What are you talking about?”

Noguduk was about to jump up from his seat, but a strong power pressed down on his shoulders. He had no choice, but to sit back down. A sturdily built young man had pressed both his hands on his shoulders. It was a form of demonstration telling him to stay still. Noguduk’s complexion turned pale.

“What..what are you doing? What are you trying to do?”

When he became frightened, Ha-taegyong signaled the youth with his eyes. The youth gradually dispelled his strength, and he let go of Noguduk’s shoulder.

“Mr. Noguduk. Please calm down and listen. I’ve told you this before, but I don’t have that much time to explain this. We have to finish our preparation before moving to another location. If there is some time to spare later, I’ll tell you the rest of the story. Please don’t ask me any questions. Just do as I say starting from now. It won’t be too late to tell you the specific details of the story after we leave this room.”

“.....”

He still didn’t know what the situation was. The mood of Ha-taegyong and the rest of the people was too serious for him to make a fuss. Noguduk didn’t live over 40 years without knowing when to take a hint. He instinctively knew that it would benefit him to not say anything here, so he slightly nodded. Ha-taegyong saw this, so his explanation must have somewhat gotten through to him. Therefore, he spoke with a satisfied expression.

“We are short on time. Please follow me.”

Noguduk and Kim-jungin followed Ha-taegyong’s direction, and they followed him to the corner of the room. The room was square shaped and it was about the size of a large lecture hall. Each corner had various equipment displayed. Ha-taegyong brought them to a location with swords, bows, clubs, *etc.* They looked nefarious just by looking at them, and the various weapons were arranged in order inside steel display case.

“Mr. Kim-Jungin. Please select a weapon from here. Also, Mr. Noguduk... Please meditate.”

Noguduk was toying with an iron bar when he suddenly heard that. He replied in confusion.

“What are you talking about? Meditate?”

“Once we entered this place, we were all given power so we could work as hunters. From this place’s terminology, it is called Empowering. If you meditate, it’ll allow you to enter your inner world. You will have access to your Journal. It is

a method where you will be able to see the power you were given and verify your current age. Since Mr. Noguduk is an outsider, I can't guarantee if you were Empowered.... There is no downside in checking your Journal.

"If you insist on it..."

The truth was he didn't entirely understand what Empowering, Hunter or Journal meant. Still, there was no downside in trying, so Noguduk followed meekly. As directed by Ha-taegyong, he sat in a lotus position, and he clasped hands on top of the location where his calves intersected.

"It is very easy to Meditate. Mr. Noguduk should repeatedly think about how you usually look, and continue to think about your whole body. The inherent system will naturally react to you. Then you just check the record, and remember it for next time. ...of course this assumes that you had been Empowered."

He spoke with a friendly smile, but his last words were a bit weird. Noguduk closed his eyes, while feeling a bit upset. Then he started slowly drawing his figure inside his mind as instructed by Ha-taeyong.

He used to have abundant hair when he was young, but the heavy workload and stress reduced it. Now there was no trace of hair, and he was a smooth bald headed man. The only thing that became more plentiful was the fat around his stomach. His lower stomach protruded like a tadpole. By merely thinking about it, it automatically made him sigh. Moreover, the weight gained through aging made his limbs plump. His body wasn't inferior compared to any other Korean older male.(TLN:this isn't a compliment. He is saying he has a dad body) The only thing he could take pride in was the fact that he was a goalkeeper for his college soccer team. He was tall and had broad shoulders. However, he was buried by fat now. It was basically putting a pearl necklace on a pig.

'I used to be successful when I was young.....'

Even if he pined for it, the prime of his youth would never return. While cleansing his palate, there was a surprising change.

The figure of the absent-mindedly standing uncle with a pot-belly started to slowly infiltrate into the void, and it blurred.. In front of him, a semi-transparent computer display like a hologram appeared. While Noguduk was being surprised, clear words started printing one after the other inside the rectangle window.

[Journal Number : K903-32439]

[Name : Noguduk]

[Tribe&Race : Human]

[Class : –]

[Talent : –]

[Characteristics : –]

“What the hell is this....?”

This was Noguduk’s first words after seeing the display. He understood the name, but what was the Journal Number? Class? Talent? What was all this? What did the blank space next to it mean? Ha-taegyong said he should check his record, but there was nothing to check. Except for his name, everything else was empty.

“Sigh.”

Noguduk didn’t have any information regarding the current situation, but his instinct told him that the content of his record wasn’t good.

‘I don’t think the other people’s record will be empty like mine.....’

He was told to check and memorize the content of the Journal. He was wondering if he should lie about it when he heard his name being called from outside his consciousness. The voice was calm and restrained, so it must be Ha-taegyong.

He opened his eyes by a sliver, and he matched eyes with Ha-taegyong, who was staring at him. He gave out a fake cough after being surprised. As if Ha-taegyong was interested, he promptly questioned Noguduk.

“How was it? Was there a Journal?”

“Cough, hmm.... It was there. What was the Journal number... What number was it?”

He mentioned that the Journal Number had appeared, and he had seen it. Ha-taegyong and the surrounding people all had a surprised expression. According to what they knew, there were only 10 people in the draft. However, there was an 11th member, and it was confirmed that the outsider, Noguduk, had received a Journal Number.

Noguduk feigned as if he was trying to remember the Journal Number, and he spoke hesitantly. This caused Ha-taegyong to lower his hand, and end his words.

“The Journal Number isn’t that important. You have to check your class and talent, so you could pick a weapon suitable for you. For example, if you have talent in swordsmanship then it is advantageous for you to pick the sword. If you have affinity to magic or other affiliated talent then you should pick a Wand.”

“Uh, that, that is..... It was empty.”

Chapter 2

1# (No talent)

“What?”

“It’s empty. My Class and Talent.... It is followed by an empty space.”

From start to finish, Ha-taegyong had kept his composure, but this was the first time his poker face had cracked a little bit. The people, who had gathered around to watch, was taken aback, and some sent gazes that indicated they hadn’t expected much from him.

Soon, Ha-taegyong had a splitting headache. His opinion of Noguduk switched from ‘pending’ to ‘troublesome burden’. It would be different if he had a Class or Talent that would be of help to them, but he was just a regular person... No, by looking at his appearance, they would be fortunate if he didn’t grab their ankles.

Since they didn’t have much time, Ha-taegyong quickly composed his thoughts. If forced, he would throw him(TLN:the MC) away.

He was pretty sure the others wouldn’t object. Everyone had just met, so they didn’t really have any impressions about each other. There didn’t seem to be anyone nosy enough to give up on everything, and help out Noguduk. At the very least, this would serve as a wake-up call for him as to the seriousness of his situation.

“Mr. Noguduk.”

“Uh, yes?”

“If we exclude Mr. Noguduk... Mmmm. There are ten people here including Mr. Kim-jungin. We plan to travel to the next region as a group. Once the transfer is complete, this room will disappear not so long afterwards. Do you remember me telling you this? Any ways, Mr. Noguduk just have to exit the room with us.”

Noguduk listened to his words, while being depressed. Ha-taegyong glanced sideways at his figure before continuing to speak.

“No one knows where the next region is or what dangers await us. The only thing we are sure about is that it will be very dangerous. You can say this is some form of a test. Our goal is to pass this test with a ‘good’ grade. To say it again.....”

He further lowered his already low voice, and it built the tension. After he licked his lips, Ha-taegyong slowly finished speaking.

“If you don’t want to die, then you have to look out for your own safety.”

Several women looked at him with sympathetic eyes, but they did nothing else. They knew that the Draft was a challenging test, and they couldn’t afford to look after a stranger. If this was earth, then they wouldn’t have hesitated to put forth a helping hand to him, but it was a different story in this place.

Ha-taegyong’s statement explicitly distanced himself from Noguduk. The other’s stepped back and just watched him. Their attitude drenched his stretched mind with cold water. He stood up with agitation in his eyes, and he grabbed the shoulder of Ha-taegyong, who was closest to him.

“Hey, hey, hey! What are you saying? Are you playing around? I might die? Why would I die! What are you guys really up to? Are you some terrorists... Is that it?”

He unconsciously put some strength into the hands grabbing the shoulders, and he roughly shook Ha-taegyong’s upper body. This caused one man to step forward, and separate Noguduk from Ha-taegyong. The arm strength was so strong that he had let go of Ha-taegyong before he realized it, and he took a couple steps back. It was only for a moment, but the wrist that was grabbed by the youth was slightly numb.

The youth with a short sports cut hair style spat towards Noguduk, while his eyes narrowed slightly.

“Uncle. I get that you are in a bad situation, but you have to take care of your own business. Do you really think this is earth? Or maybe you think this is a dream? Do you want me to pinch you? If it’s pinching hard, then I’m confident in doing it for you.”

“You, you bastard! How dare you, a young man, speak to me that way.....!”

Noguduk was about to pop a vein, while yelling at the youth with the poor attitude. The youth cracked his neck from side to side, and he saw the youth raise his arm. One could see brawny arms protruding from his sleeveless shirt. This shut him up.

If he wasn't careful then he really might be beaten.

"You... You are trying to hit an adult? I have a child your age!"

He barely squeezed out a rebuke, but the only thing that was returned was a cold snort.

"So what, you want to look for my parents?"

"What?"

"Cut the crap. We came here risking our lives. We don't have the luxury to look after you, uncle. Do you understand me? If I break any part of you then no one would help you here."

"Mr. Kim-gyushik. Stop it."

He wanted to yell more, but the woman approached next to him. The woman's restraint caused him to back off, and he held his tongue. The woman had kind eyes and she was very memorable. She approached him slowly, and she carefully supported the stunned Noguduk.

"I'm sorry. Everyone's nerve is on edge."

"Uh, uh, you are...., No, Miss.... Yoon-hweeji? You are actress Yoon-hweeji?"

"Ah. Yes... You are right."

The woman acknowledged it, while smiling awkwardly. This was basically like a life line for Noguduk. The actress Yoon-hweeji was considered to be one of the top 10 young actress amongst the 20 and 30 year olds. She was considered to be top class. She had the face, the body and the acting chops. She wasn't lacking in any aspect. She never had any bad rumors or scandal around her. She was the role model of the entertainment industry. Now that he thought about it, her newly released film was a block-buster.

"That's it. So that's how it is. This is a hidden camera show. You've been found out, so you can stop now."

His words were correct, right? He wanted Yoon-hweeji to agree with him, but she heartlessly shook her head from side to side.

“No. That isn’t it.”

“Ha. This uncle really has no answer.”

“Can we just leave him?”

When Yoon-hweeji heard the whispers from behind, her eyebrows, which looked to be drawn, raised slightly. She didn’t like the fact that they were trying to leave a civilian, who knew nothing about his situation. However, she also understood their situation, so she couldn’t be hasty in criticizing them. Moreover, she didn’t want to cause a division right before the draft was about to start.

First, she had to find a way to give Noguduk the maximum sense of security, so she gave him friendly smile. Then she handed over something to him.

“Even though everyone is talking that way, they aren’t cold-hearted. Please take this.”

She handed over a pea-sized white pill. Noguduk received the pill, but his expression was sour. He started to become suspicious. Maybe this was a sleeping pill or a anaesthetic.

“What is this?”

“It’s the Language Pack. The place we will go to is entirely different from earth. It is a different world that has its own official language and characters. If you eat this pill, you’ll acquire their language.”

It was hard to believe her words. While he hesitated, Yoon-hweeji gave an identical pill to Kim-jungin. Kim-Jungin received the pill like Noguduk, but he didn’t hesitate to use the pill. After seeing Kim-jungin taking the pill, he reluctantly swallowed the pill. The moment the pill touched his tongue it dissolved without any trace.

Clap clap clap!

Before the weird taste disappeared from his mouth, Ha-taegyong clapped to call attention from the surrounding.

“We really don’t have any more time. Mr Noguduk?”

“Uh, Mmm.”

“I understand this is hard to believe. I won’t force you. I have no thoughts of doing so. It is up to you to follow us or not. Only, I’ll say this up front. I cannot guarantee your safety. We aren’t here to play. Moreover, Mr Kim-Jungin.”

Ha-taegyong didn’t give him the chance to reply. He immediately called out to Kim-jungin.

“Yes.”

“I won’t ask you about your Talent or Class. It is forbidden. However, you’ll have to tell us what roles you will be able to fulfill.”

Several people nodded their heads. It seems they had already discussed and decided each of their roles. Kim-jungin seemed to be convinced, so he spoke while picking up an average lengthed sword from the weapon rack.

“I know how to handle a sword.”

“Good. This is the last confirmation. Raise your hand when your name is called. We haven’t exchanged names with Mr Kim-jungin. The forward group deals with close combat, and they are in charge of the preliminary action. Mr Kim-jungin is included in the forward group. The rest of you should memorize everyone’s face, and name. The forward group also includes Kim-gyushik, Park-junghwan, Ahn-haemi. There are four of you. Ah, Miss Ahn-haemi will guide us as the vanguard.”

The man with the sports cut hair, who had scuffled with Noguduk just now, raised his hand. Also, a man with a robust body and a woman as tall as a model also raised their hands.

“Next is the center group. Yoon-hweeji, Che-nayun, Hwang-gijong, and me. It’ll be the 4 of us. We are in charge of combat support.”

“Lastly, its the rear group. Shin-soyool, Lee-junghan. It’ll be the 2 of you. The two of you will defend our rear, and if something happens to the front group, you’ll immediately reinforce them. You’ll have to always be on standby. Both of you should not leave your spot simultaneously. Just know that Shin-soyool will be deployed first.”

The college student he saw first, and a normal looking man raised their hands. This ended the role allocation. Everyone carried a weapon, and after confirming this, Ha-taegyong turned his gaze towards the center of the room. There was an elementary student-sized hourglass dripping red sand. Unlike the heap at the bottom, the top only had about a fist-sized amount of sand. Even now, the sand was visibly decreasing.

“It is almost time. Let us move.”

Ha-taegyong strode to the front, and he unhesitatingly moved towards the door. Eventually, Ha-taeyong threw open the door and he was sucked into the black space across the door. Soon, the forward group of Kim-gyushik, Park-Junghwan and Ahn-haemi followed after him. Before Kim-jung in stepped into the black space, he stared at Noguduk with a complicated expression. Then he abruptly disappeared like the people in front of him.

Yoon-hweeji, who was watching the others transfer, picked up a bat-like iron rod. She gave it to Noguduk, who was absent-mindedly standing around.

“Since we are in a hurry, just come along with this. I’ve heard it is dangerous for a beginner to use a sword. Instead, this should be better. Let’s go.”

“I, I guess so.....”

At her insistence, Noguduk scrambled to move his body.

Noguduk’s massive body was the last one to pass into the swaying darkness, and there were no one left inside the room. The bleak silence descended, and finally the last grain of sand that was suspended on the upper portion of the hour glass passed through the neck of the bottle. It dropped onto the red sand pile.

Then.

Crack! Craaaaaaack!

Spider web-like fissure started forming on the white walls. The marble floor, the desk made out of sturdy hardwood, and the weapons made from steel started to crack also. It nosily burst like stepping on thin ice.

The thick pieces split into smaller pieces, and the smaller pieces disintegrated

into dust. This kept continuing until the large room was completely destroyed. This took only a moment. Finally, a deep darkness like the tongue of a snake whipped out and it swallowed the empty space.

Chapter 3

2# Draft

The group was thrown into the middle of a field overlooking a small hill.

“Whew~ It feels like something will jump out at us~. It’s so empty.”

This was Che-nayun’s first impression as she looked around her surrounding. The other party members made a fuss at her flippant manner, but they seem to agree with her sentiment. As her words had indicated, the large field was very bleak. The floor was littered with wild grass, which was brown and listless. If it weren’t bizarrely twisted ancient trees, one might mistake this place for a desert. No, it may as well been a desert since one couldn’t find any hint of green in this place.

“I guess that place is our destination.”

The muscular man, Kim-gyushik, pointed to the top of the hill with his husky voice. The end of Kim-gyushik’s thick finger was pointing at a creepy white stone tower with a triangular roof. There was an unknown bird sculpture hanging at the edge of the roof and it looked like it was looking down on the group.

Even if Kim-gyushik hadn’t pointed it out, the group would have noticed the winding narrow path leading to it.

“Ha, a tower in the middle of a desert. It sets quite the mood.”

“Let’s head over there.”

The tall woman, Ahn-haemi, took point, and the group slowly headed towards the tower. The forward, middle and rear group moved with 2-3 meters of distance between them. They decided there wouldn’t be any danger until they had entered the tower, so they walked while chatting. Also, the surrounding was a wide-open field, so there was almost no chance of an ambush. Ha-taegyong had also thought this, so he didn’t restrain them in any way.

Noguduk was of no interest to anyone, so he walked at the very end. Next to

him, there was a female college student with a short sword, and a man with a pair of hand axe hanging off of his belt. He matched steps with them. From time to time, they heard laughter coming from the other groups, and one could tell they were getting acquainted with each other. This group was particularly quiet. It could be because they had less members compared to the other groups. However, the uncomfortable existence of Noguduk added to the problem.

The female college student, Shin-soyool, couldn't stand the uncomfortable silence so she let out a sigh.

'Whew. I must have been crazy. I shouldn't have volunteered to manage the rear group.'

Lee-junghwan seemed like he preferred juggling his hand axes over getting along with other people. The uncle named Noguduk was sullen, so he wasn't in a mood where she could strike up a conversation. She still had to walk like this for 20 to 30 minute, and if the mood stayed like this.....

'This is suffocating. I can't take it anymore.'

She was an outgoing person, so she couldn't take it anymore. She spoke first. She chose Noguduk, since he seemed relatively easy to approach. Lee-Junghan kept twirling his ugly hand axe, while emitting an air of solitude. Noguduk was easier to talk to. Of course, she also felt sympathy in the corner of her heart.

'I feel sorry for this uncle. How did he get involved in this....'

"Uncle?"

"Huh?"

Noguduk turned his head towards her with a stupid look. Then he saw a pale, little tear-drop shaped face. Now that he had broken out of his stupor, he realized she was the female college student he first spoke to. Her name was Shin-soyool. Now that he observed her closely, she had fine facial features and a fair appearance.(TLN: ears eyes mouth and nose => shortened it to appearance) Her lustrous black hair was tied into a ponytail, and it exposed her forehead. She had white skin, and she evoked a feeling of a recently blossomed peony(TLN: its a pink flower). Even if she didn't realize it, she had melted the hearts of the surrounding male students

If it were normal times, she would be holding a pen between her slim hands, but currently she was holding onto a blade, which scattered blue light.

“Uncle?”

“Yeah?”

The sound he heard for a second time(TLN: she said uncle twice) immediately woke his mind up.

“Ah, ah, ah. I was thinking about something else. Yes, why did you call me?”

“Uh, mmm... You seem more quieter than I thought.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“If you look at what you just went through... To be honest, anyone would feel anxiety if one suddenly fell into this place. If it was me then I probably would have cried and made a fuss?”

Noguduk alternatively looked at Shin-soyool’s face, and the hand that was grasping her small sword. He didn’t agree with her last words(TLN: he doesn’t agree she would have cried), but he didn’t show it on the surface. She had shown him kindness by speaking to him, so he replied out of courtesy.

Truthfully, he had mostly come to terms with the situation. The deciding factor was the fact that they fell into the wasteland. He had experienced a supernatural event like teleportation, so the other details felt comparatively small. He was able to stave off despair, and it was an advantage that comes with aging since he will be 50 in a couple years.

“Well, yes. However, what can I do? I received the thing called the Journal and now I’m here. How can I not believe it? I was unsure until we left the room... Shit.”

“Heh. So you have years of experience.”

“It’s not experience. I just give up faster.”

The two of them continued to to have a friendly talk, and Lee-junghan continued to be disinterested in the other two people.

“So what are you guys? I want to know something about it.”

At Noguduk's urging, Shin-soyool briefly agonized over it. She didn't mind telling him, but she was thinking about where to start the story.

"Mmm. We are called Hunters. Moreover, this place is called the Septic square. We shorten it and call it Square. Basically, this world is called Square. We are... Hunters are... How should I say this..."

"We are monster hunters."

Lee-junghan suddenly butted in. His eyes were still locked on to the hand-axes spinning in his fingers. Shin-soyool pouted when her explanation was interrupted midstream, but Lee-junghwan continued to speak without paying any attention to her.

"Uncle. Do you like soccer? I mean watching it. They have something like K-League and Premier League." (TLN: he is speaking in casual form, not respectful form. It's an insult considering there is about 30 year age difference.)

'How come all the guys here are rude? Jeez, these damn kids.'

Noguduk complained inside, while he nodded his head.

"Of course. I'm in this situation because of soccer..."

The moment the car had hit him in the cross walk, a supernatural power must have formed and dropped him here. If he was nitpicking, the main reason why he was crossing the cross walk at that time was the soccer match. Of course, he muttered all of this, so Lee-junghwan couldn't make out what he said.

".....?"

Lee-junghwan had question in his eyes, but he refrained from asking any further.

"Then it'll be easy for me to explain this. Both the earth and Square are occupied by humans. The only difference is that this place is full of monsters called the Kar'm. We are mercenaries invited from earth to exterminate the monsters. The people of earth are more suitable for 'Empowering' than the natives of Square. This is why we are called 'Hunters'. As the word implies, we were brought here to hunt the monsters."

"The test we are taking right now is called the Draft. You can say it is the

selection of rookies. There are other teams that are also participating in the Draft right now. Depending on the grade, the amount of attention paid to us by the Clubs varies.

“Club?”

“The Hunter Clubs. It is the organization affiliated to the Hunters. For example, doesn’t soccer or baseball have teams? Just think of it like that. They play a similar role. If your grade in the draft is excellent then the larger clubs will make you an offer. After you make a contract, you can live here comfortably for the duration of the contract. This one test could set you up for life.”

Shin-soyool, who was listening from the side, couldn’t hold back so she continued explaining from where he left off.

“That is why! This is the reason why everyone is on edge. The SAT? It can’t even be compared to this since you have to really put your life on the line. I’ve heard that the monsters were very formidable. To tell you the truth, I’m a little bit worried. This is my first live battle....”

Noguduk, who was listening closely, suddenly had a question. By listening to their stories, they were also new to this place. So how were they so knowledgeable?

“You heard they were formidable? From whom?”

“Ah, about that. The Scouter that chose me....”

“We’re here.”

Shin-soyool’s face sulked at being interrupted again, but she earnestly looked towards the front. After Noguduk saw this, he felt his grip tighten on the club. Maybe this was the instincts he had learned from many hardships giving him a warning.

Something really dangerous was in front of them.

One couldn’t tell from beneath the hill, but the entrance to the tower was fairly large. There were square windows on the surface of the wall like gradations on a ruler. By counting it, one could guess that the structure had 4 to 5 floors. The tower was shaped like a thick cylinder with a conical roof on top of it. Che-

nayun from the middle group complained that it looked like a flipped over pencil. She complained that the tower's architect must not have had any formal training. Later on, Shin-soyool hinted that Che-nayun was an art student.

‘No wonder her face looks drawn on.’

He had a moment of clarity on why Che-nayun wore an uncomfortable amount of heavy make-up.

After they entered the tower, they were greeted by stale and humid air that stuck to their lungs. Every time they took a breath in, there was a pungent smell that stabbed at the end of their nose. While everyone was frowning, Ha-taegyong reassigned Ahn-haemi from the front to the middle combat support group. Since they weren't in an open terrain, he told them he didn't need someone with good vision in the front.

“What are we going to do about light? If we go in any further then we won't be able to see anything. Should we make a torch?”

“We have to... It looks like we don't need it. Look over there.”

“Uh? Is that a lamp?”

“It is filled with oil. We just have to start the fire with a flint.”

There were 3 oil lamps lined up next to the entrance. They guessed this was the host being considerate. It was put out for them, so it was human nature to use it. To satisfy everyone, the lamps were distributed to each of the groups. Then they got into a line and they launched their expedition.

“Ooh... It stinks.”

“Shh. Be quiet.”

Excluding Che-nayun's voice complaining to Ha-taegyong, the exploration of the first floor was quiet and smooth. No, it was more accurate to say there weren't anything there. They turned left from the exit then they circled back to their original position. They couldn't find anything, so the group felt a little bit of their pulse slow down. However, they were successful in figuring out how the tower was structured. Normally, towers like these have similar floor plans for each floor. By studying the layout of this floor, there was high chance that it'll

help them in exploring the other floors.

“There is nothing here?”

“The edge of the corridor is surrounded by the middle 4 rooms. The stairs leading to the next floor is on the opposite side.”

“The problem is there is another stairway leading downstairs.”

Usually, the problem that occurs during an exploration delays the party. They had to decide if they want to go upstairs first or downstairs first.

“If we go downstairs, then it’ll most likely be the basement. Let us go there first for the sake of being tidy? I don’t like my backside being dirty.(TLN:figure of speech *i.e.* don’t like leaving something unfinished behind)”

“Let’s go up. The upper floor will at least have sunlight coming in from the windows onto the corridors. We won’t be able to see anything in the basement. Do we really need to go to a dangerous place first?”

They all had differing opinions. The men like Park-junghwan wanted to go to the basement first. The women like Yoon-hweeji, Ahn-haemi and Che-nayun insisted they shouldn’t take risks from the start.

The decision was Ha-taegyong’s responsibility as the leader. He carefully listened to both sides of the argument then he spoke.

“Each argument have their merit. So let’s do this. We don’t know if the basement is single or multi-layered. It might be relatively dangerous,so we’ll only check out the entrance. If it is a simple storage room, then we’ll continue to explore it. If the layout is complicated then we’ll explore it later. Does anyone disagree?”

Both positions were addressed in the solution, so there weren’t any disagreement. Without a doubt, there were good reasons as to why Ha-taegyong was chosen as the leader.

‘He was employed by the H trading firm? He is really giving off an elitist air.’

Somehow, Noguduk didn’t like Ha-taegyong. He had a cold, and intelligent face. He wore a suit, which didn’t belong in this place, and he had taken on the role of a leader. Whether it was Che-nayun or Ahn-haemi, they were stealing

glances at him, so Noguduk didn't like any part of him. It had more to do with him being by Ha-taegyong in the ready room.(TLN: his attitude changed after he learned MC didn't have any skills)

"Look at that guy. He's a hotshot."

"What?"

As if she had heard his muttering, Shin-soyool turned to look at him. Noguduk kept his mouth tightly sealed. He was being jealous of a young man in the prime of his youth, and it put a bitter taste in his mouth. He thought about what he was like at that age, and Noguduk felt self pity.

They headed toward the stairway located on the other side, and they slowly headed down the stairway with Kim-gyushik in the front. The back group of Noguduk, Shin-soyool and Lee-jonghwan slowly followed after them, and soon they heard the dejected voice of Kim-gyushik.

"What is this? This place is locked?"

"The steel chains, and the lock is very thick. We'll have to find the key."

"Jeez~. We just wasted our time."

After Che-nayun's flighty voice ended, the front group started climbing back up the stairs. After hearing their explanation, they found out that the route leading to the basement was blocked by a sturdy steel door, and the door handle had a thick lock on it. There was no way they could enter the basement. Therefore, the discussion on which direction they should explore became useless.

"This might have worked out better for us. Let us go straight to the 2nd floor. Also, observe your surrounding as a precaution. We might be able to find the key to the underground lock. Also... Mmmm."

Ha-taegyong's brows furrowed a little bit. He saw that the atmosphere had become much looser. They were tense when entering the tower, but the only thing they found on the first floor was empty rooms and a basement that was locked. It was inevitable for them to relax in this situation. One could just see it from the way they walked. One could tell that they weren't being cautious.

‘This isn’t good.’

“We’ve entered the second floor. Front group, be careful...”

As he was about to warn them, an urgent shout exploded out from the front group.

“Hey, don’t go there!”

“What? Ooh, ooh-ahhhhhhk! Ggah-ahhhh!”

Clank!

Accompanying the ominous husky voice, someone started screaming. As events unfolded in the front, the general formation they were in broke. As if she had seen something, Che-nayun also started screaming and Hwan-gijung rushed to the front. Even Yoon-hweeji’s face had paled. During all of this, Ha-taegyong was trying hard to hold onto his control over the group.

“Quiet! Quiet!”

“Ggyahhhhhhhh!”

“Miss Che-nayun! Please!”

However, Che-nahyun couldn’t calm her surprised heart, and she continued screaming. As a last resort, Lee-junghwan quickly moved from his place in the back group, and he forcefully shut Che-nahyun’s mouth. Ha-taegyong coldly glared at Che-nayun’s frightened face. Her face was already white from her make-up, but now her face was devoid of all color.

Chapter 4

2# Draft

Ha-taegyong warned her with an irritated voice.

“If you make another fuss then I’ll remove you from the group.”

“What, what did you just say?”

She had somehow escaped from Lee-junghan’s grip, and Che-nayun talked back angrily. However, Ha-taegyong ignored her and he headed towards the front.

He decided he didn’t need to waste his mental power facing that kind of a woman.

The front group was in darkness, but they came into view as Ha-taegyong brought the lamp closer. Park-junghwan was on the floor clutching his ankle. Next to him, Hwang-gijung was giving him first aid. The two others, Kim-jungin and Kim-gyushik, were on-guard and they were looking around their surrounding. The lamp that was held by Park-junghwan was rolling around beneath Kim-gyushik’s feet. At a glance, the oil had spilled so it probably can’t perform its duty.

‘There is only 2 lamps left. We’ve already made such a big mistake. Stupid bastard.’

A light of contempt briefly swept across Ha-taegyong’s eyes as he was looking down at Park-junghwan. However, no one noticed it.

“What happened?”

“I think he got caught in a trap...”

Hwang-gijung was looking at the details, when his words trailed off. Ha-taegyong sensed that the situation wasn’t good, so he moved closer to look at the affected area.

“Gahhhh..... My foooot.....”

There was a steel trap as thick as the first joint of his finger wrapped around the ankle. The trap was dug in so deep that the ankle was cut half way, and it was a miracle that it wasn't amputated. It was impossible for it to dig in that deep just from the pressure of the clamp. After coming to that conclusion, Ha-taegyong turned toward Hwang-gijong.

As if Hwang-gijong had sensed his intent, he started detailing what had happened.

"There are blades attached to the inner part of the snare."

"What about first aid?"

"We've done our best to staunch the blood flow, but the blood loss is too severe. First, we have to get rid of that snare. The worst case scenario... We might have to amputate the foot."

"What? You, you mother fuck...er! You son of a bitch! You want to cut off my foot? You want to die!"

The fallen Park-junghwan cursed at the top of his lungs with bloodshot eyes. His voice couldn't hide his uneasiness and despair. He knew what was going to be done. Putting the amputation of his foot aside, he knew that he might be abandoned.

"I can stand! I can fight! Shit... Ughh!"

"Junghwan, stop behaving so disgracefully. Just sleep a little bit."

Kim-gyushik chopped down behind Park-junghwan's neck. His eyes rolled back into his head and he fainted immediately. Unlike his downplaying words, his face had hardened. He had a similar disposition as Park-junghwan, so he had treated him like an older brother of kindred spirit. He must have felt uncomfortable inside since they had a brother-like relationship.

Noguduk was observing all of this from the corner, and he swallowed drily. His eyes were fixed on Park-junghwan's ankle, which was covered in blood. He couldn't look away, and the blood started to make a small puddle. Even though he was old, he reacted this way so the others' reaction was as expected. The women were especially spooked.

When Park-junghwan fainted after speaking briefly, they let out an involuntary

‘Ah!’ and they jumped in place.

It was their first casualty, and its significance was large.

The fact that they could really die was finally felt. Even though the person didn’t die, he had received an injury that disqualified him from battle. He didn’t check beneath his feet for a moment, and he got tangled in an absurd trap. He was harmed, and this was probably lowest point in his life. No, the grade wasn’t important. If he didn’t get treatment soon then he’ll live his life as a disabled person after the draft had ended.

So what should they do with Park-junghwan? Everyone stared at Ha-taegyong with meaningful gazes.

“Currently, we don’t have any methods to treat Mr. Park-junghwan. I believe it would be best if we left Mr. Park-junghwan at the entrance. This should be safer for him.”

“...you want to throw him away? If we leave him there then he might die!”

Yoon-hweeji spoke with an angry face, but Ha-taegyong was still cold as ever.

“It is a risk I am willing to take. Didn’t we all agree to this? Moreover, it isn’t guaranteed that he will die. At the very least, there shouldn’t be any risk factors until we ascend the stairs.”

“He could die from excessive blood loss.”

“Mr. Hwang-gijung did his best to staunch the blood. We just have to hope he will last until the draft ends.”

“You... How can you say that....!”

Yoon-hweeji had a hard time connecting her words, because she was so angry. Noguduk felt a bit of regret observing this. Of course, he didn’t feel sorry for Park-junghwan. He felt regret at his circumstance where he wasn’t able to step up and help Yoon-hweeji. In his heart, he rooted for Yoon-hweeji, but he also understood the nasty Ha-taegyong’s perspective.

“Is Miss Yoon-hweeji going to take Mr Park-junghwan with you?”

“What?”

“Mr Park-junghwan is unable to walk right now. So who is going to help him? Also, are you going to be responsible for the loss of our fighting strength? What if this causes a secondary damage? Will Ms. Yoon-hweeji take responsibility? How are you going to do that?”

“Ah, that, I....”

The rapidly fired arguments from Ha-taegyong made Yoon-hweeji unable to find her words, so she kept opening and closing her mouth. She was generally against the idea of leaving the injured, but she hadn't really thought about what would happen afterwards. She probably hadn't had the need to give thought to it before. She had everything from wealth to honor, so everyone probably took care of everything if she said the word. (TLN:since she is wealthy/famous, everyone just agreed and did everything she wanted)

Everyone was observing the war of words between the two without breathing. Once Yoon-hweeji became speechless, they thought it was over. They felt sorry for Park-junghwan, but after thinking over it twice and then a third time, Ha-taegyong's logic made more sense. Their current situation was too dangerous for them to expect humanitarianism.

However, they had underestimated Yoon-hweeji's principle. She nibble on her lips. As if she had come to a decision, she spoke forcefully with a resolute light in her eyes.

“I'll stay here.”

“What? What did you just say?” (TLN: he was speaking in a respectful form before)

Even Ha-taegyong seemed to be shocked as he unintentionally talked down to her. Yoon-hweeji slowly blinked her eye once then she spoke again in a peaceful voice.

“Any ways, I'm a single shot power.(TLN: I'm guessing her ability can only be used once) It'll be hard for me to be of immediate help, so I'll remain here and look over Mr Park-junghwan. Since I brought it up, I'll take responsibility.”

“Ha. Do you really think that makes any sense....!”

With their eyes dilated, the two was about to enter into the second round.

(TLN: second round of argument)

-Sssahhhhh! Shwee-shiiiiiiik!

On the one hand, it sounded like deflating air, but it also sounded like someone was whistling. The group looked at each other as if to say, “Did you hear that?” Ah-haemi’s senses were comparatively more sensitive than the others, so she turned toward the sound with a grave expression. She looked towards the dark corridor across from her. She was sure that the sound wasn’t natural. The tension between the people was like a taught thread.

Ha-taegyong had already recovered his bearing, and he ordered Shin-soyool from the rear group to join the front group. The incident with Park-junghwan made Shin-soyool hesitate, but he was the first one up from the reserves. She had no reasons to refuse the order. Eventually, she walked forward with slumped shoulders as she held onto the lamp.

During all of this, Kim-jungin had knelt on the floor and he put his ears to the ground. Kim-gyushik scolded him when he saw this.

“You’ve watched too many shows. Hey, get up.”

“Footsteps... There are six. No, seven. There are seven of them.”

“What? Are you bullshitting me?”

“He is probably right. That person’s senses is extraordinary. Moreover, it is still blurry, but... I also see their silhouette. There are, at the very least, five of them.”

Ahn-haemi, who was frowning and squinting, gave credence to Kim-jungin’s words. The fact that his senses were extraordinary was shown in Kim-jungin’s warning prior to Park-junghwan stepping on the trap. Kim-gyushik didn’t say anything further, and he started to touch the head of his large mace.

After a while, the other people could clearly hear it.

-Shwaaaaaaa....

The wind noise was filled with a sense of spookiness. The distinct sound of a presence interspersed with the sound of the wind became clearer.

Tuk. Tuk. Tuk. Tuk. Tuk.

The silence of the stale basement was broken. The sound of something hard hitting the floor was getting closer, and the people's heart beat faster. They felt as if the unknown enemy approaching them was chasing after them. The oppressive air was heavy as lead, and several people from the group felt it pressing down on their spirit. They moaned through clenched teeth. Che-nayun lost all the fight she had shown towards Ha-taegyong, and she was shaking enough for one to feel pity towards her.

Tuh-buk. Tuh-buk. Tuh-buk. Tuh-buk. Tuh-buk. (TLN: heavy footstep sfx)

The sound of several something approaching was now heard in front of their noses, and it rang out loudly like thunder. The group was half filled with curiosity, and the other half was filled with fear. They stared hard into the pitch-black darkness. Soon, they could see the things come in range of the lamp's light, and they could see it walking slowly towards them.

"...skeletons?"

"Ggi-yaaaaaak! Mommy!"

Che-nayun couldn't take it any more, so she buried her face in Yoon-hweeji's arm, while she shrieked. Yoon-hweeji confirmed the identity of these things. She was so shocked that she froze like a statue. Even though Che-nayun was hanging onto her arm, she didn't react in any way.

It wasn't only Yoon-hweeji. The beings walked across the corridor, while cutting through the darkness. They were without a single ounce of flesh on their bodies. They were none other than skeletons. The party couldn't accept this unrealistic view, so they were frozen in place like a rock. The reality differed too much from the theory. Even if they knew in their head that 'monsters' would be coming out, the animated skeleton couldn't exist in their common sense, which was stuck in the modern times. This gap caused confusion, and the fear towards the unknown existences wreaked havoc inside their mind.

However, not everyone was like that.

"Forward unit! Wake up and attack!"

The members of the forward group was barely able to put themselves together again after they heard Ha-taegyong's sharp shout. While they were lifting their

weapons, a shadow suddenly ran out and the shadow quickly attacked skeletons straight on.

Ssssgak!

In a flash, Kim-jungin had cut the head off the lead skeleton, which was standing there dumbly. Then he heard the sound of the wind made from a slash. He quickly bent his body. He was able to avoid the attack that was aimed at his chest. The decapitated skeleton had counter-attacked. The blunt sword narrowly missed his back. While in a crouch, Kim-jungin proceeded to jump like a spring, and he delivered a heavy drop kick towards the skeleton's chest.

Koo-dang-tahng-tahng! (TLN: sfx of a crash)

The drop kick had the weight of a grown man behind it, and the skeleton that was directly hit fell backwards. It bowled into the other skeletons and they fell like dominoes. This was how Kim-jungin temporarily neutralized three skeletons. Soon, he proceeded to shout, while blocking the attack of another skeleton.

“These bastards will attack you even if their heads are blown away, so be careful!”

“We know since we saw it! Ooh-ryahhhhhh!”

The front group was impressed by Kim-jungin's nimble movement, but they also didn't stay still. They were scouted as the so-called hunters, so they all already had a basic quality. The front group especially was formed from people, who were confident about close quarters combat. The iron mace held a brutal strength. It broke the brittle ribs of the skeletons, and both sets of ribs were destroyed as it passed through.

“Ooh-hahaha! You bastards are like sheets of paper!”

Kim-gyushik must have gained confidence after destroying skeleton with a single strike. After bellowing loudly, he jumped into the midst of the skeletons and he swung his mace like a windmill. Kim-gyushik was solely focused on the skeletons, so he didn't pay attention to his surrounding. He randomly swung his mace and Shin-soyool, who was fighting with him, had to dodge the blind mace more so than the skeletons. If he was hit even once by mistake then his bones would surely break.

Kim-gyushik showed tremendous strength. It seemed like he had detonated something he had suppressed. There were a lot of powdered bone in the location where his mace had trampled over. The heavy mace deflected all of the skeleton's toothless weapons. One could almost feel sorry for the skeletons when seeing the sight of skulls being smashed.

Still, the skeletons wasn't totally helpless.

-Shaaaaaaaah!

The eerie sound marked the beginning of the 2nd wave coming forth.

"Fourteen, fifteen... There are over 20 of them."

Kim-jungin tried to make out the surging dark wave from across the room, and his complexion worsened. On the other hand, Kim-gyushik pounded his chest, and he twirled his mace.

"Whatever! Let them come! I'll make them into flour!"

"...that's fine and all, but could you not crush me?"

Her mouth complained, but she shook the powdered bone off of her knife. Unlike the beginning, Shin-soyool's movement was imbued with confidence.

Since the front line held sturdily, the other party members were able to escape from their panic, and they started doing the work they were assigned. Yoon-hweeji, Che-nayun, and Ha-taegyong raised their wands, and they readied to assist the front line. Ahn-haemi loaded an arrow, and she readied herself for an unexpected situation. Lee-junghwan unvaryingly guarded the rear. Also, Noguduk and Hwang-gijung moved the unconscious Park-junghwan towards the entrance.

"Jeez! My back... Why is this guy so heavy?"

Park-junghwan had a large body, but his body was also limp like wet cotton. Even the combined strength of two people had a hard time moving him.

"Thank you. I appreciate it."

"You don't have to thank me... It's something I should do. Any ways, the skeletons are alive and moving. I've seen many things in my life, but that has to be the first. For goodness sake...."

“I’ve heard the monsters appearing in the draft isn’t supposed to be at a difficult level. They are considered to be weak.”

Hwang-gijung had given an initial impression of being temperamental and obstinate; however, he maintained a respectful attitude. Noguduk liked the youth who was respectful towards an elder, so he asked few question he was curious about from before. Hwang-gijung didn’t have much to do in the battle, so he willingly answered the questions.

“If we destroy all the monsters here then the thing called the Draft will end?”

“Probably. They said there are other forms of tests, but most of it is conquering all the monsters.”

“Uh. So what are those small sticks the three of them are holding?”

“It is a wand. If you have abilities related to magic or the supernatural, it rarely manifests in the early stages. If you compare them to fighters, who contribute from the beginning, they are relatively at a disadvantage in the draft. The wand is a tool that helps narrow that gap. If one has the skill and mental fortitude, one could use the magic charged inside the wand. My wand could use Shock Wave.”

“Oh oh.... It’s something like a trump card.”

Noguduk finally understood what Yoon-hweeji was talking about when she said ‘temporary power’. He also understood why the people, who had wands, were placed in the back. The wand users couldn’t immediately be used in a battle, but they were a trump card that could turn the tide of battle with a single blow.

Hwang-gijung scratched his head with a forced expression.

“Truthfully, I feel sorry towards the front group. We call ourselves the trump card, but we aren’t much help in this kind of battle. I’ve even brought another weapon, but Mr. Ha-taegyon said we should conserve magic as much as we can... I guess it would be more disastrous if I unnecessarily went forth and got hurt.”

“Well, I guess that make sense.”

-Shaaaaaaaah.....

“...again? These bastards are coming continuously.”

“...no. I don't think the sound is coming from that side.”

Both of them turned their heads at the same time, and they looked below towards the stairs leading to the 1st floor. Shin-soyool had taken the lamp, so there weren't any lamps illuminating the rear. They couldn't see past the dark stairway. However, the skeleton's distinct footstep was heard clearly enough to make them shiver. Noguduk's adam's apple moved as he swallowed, and he unconsciously took a step back.

“What's happening? There shouldn't be anything on the 1st floor?”

“I have no idea. First, Mr. Park-junghwan....”

-Shahhhhhk!

Chapter 5

2# (Draft)

Before his words had ended, a skeleton with a fractured skull rushed forth from the darkness with its mouth wide open.

“Ooh-ahhhhk!”

The frightened Noguduk reflexively swung his steel club at the skull. The first skeleton staggered backward, but soon the rest of them filled the spot. The others, who had climbed up, let out a strange sound. At a conservative estimate, there were about dozen bodies. If they broke through the back, it was obvious that the ranks would be destroyed. With a desperate expression, Hwang-gijung raised his wand and he recited a spell.

“Shock Wave!”

After a short activation word, the empty air exploded! Accompanying the sound of a leather drum ripping, a strong gust swept ruthlessly through the line of skeletons. The skeletons tried to resist by moving their hands and feet. The skeletons had worked hard to crawl up the stairs, but they eventually rolled back down the stairs.

Noguduk, who was resolutely getting ready to battle against the skeletons, saw this surprising sight, and his two eyes became round.

“Huk, huk, huk!” (TLN: gasp, gasp, gasp!)

He succeeded in buying some time, but Hwang-gijong’s condition wasn’t optimal. He had used his wand mindlessly and it caused him to excessively consume his stamina and mental power. Fortunately, Lee-junghwan wasn’t late in backing them up. It seems he didn’t need to use his wand any more.

“Go to the middle and rest. I’ll take care of this place.”

“Hoo-ook. Hook... Ok.”

Hwang-gijung lowered his head towards Lee-junghan, who stiffly gestured with

his hand. Before he headed towards Ha-taegyong, he asked Noguduk to bring Park-junghwan to a safer place. Noguduk slowly nodded his head, and he dragged Park-junghwan away from the entrance.

“The bastards will climb back up. Will the two of us be able to block them?”

“Two? I can do it myself. I just have to block the stairs, so it won’t be a problem.”

‘Damn bastard.’

Noguduk tried to be friendly towards Lee-junghwan, but Lee-junghwan didn’t care if he frowned or not. Lee-junghwan looked down the stairs with calm eyes. Instead of his usual hand-axe, he was holding a long spear. He had decided a longer weapon was more suited to fend off the skeletons, who were coming up from below.

“They are coming. Uncle should just stay by my side and watch.”

“Do whatever you want. I’ll go bring the lamp.”

There were only 2 lamps left. One was shedding light for the front group and the other one was in the possession of Ha-taegyong’s middle group. It would have been preferable to have the lamp in the middle group, but the lamp was needed in the rear group since enemies had shown up. Ha-taegyong was smart so he would probably give it up without a fuss. Maybe, he even wanted them to take the lamp.

As Noguduk had predicted, Ha-taegyong gave him the lamp as if he had waited for Noguduk. He also said if the rear was getting rough then he should send a message at the earliest possible moment. He stole a glance over his shoulder, and the heated battle in the front line was still continuing. Even the heaven piercing spirit of Kim-gyushik had lessened considerably, and he wasn’t fighting by recklessly swing his mace. Kim-jungin and Shinsoyool changed tactic by finding a gap between the skeletons, and they used a single strike to destroy the head.

After the initial phase, Kim-gyushik’s stamina consumption lessened and Kim-jungin continued his outstanding performance. It made one wonder if he was former special forces or a fighter. He used flashy movements to dodge the

skeleton's attack, and he had good enough sword skills to disable the enemy by accurately attacking the joints. He was fully pulling off tricks in real combat, which professional swordsmen do in exhibition, against the skeletons. Occasionally, Kim-gyushik looked towards Kim-jungin with an uncomfortable expression. It seemed like he was conscious of the other's brilliant exploit.

Shinsoyool couldn't compare to Kim-jungin. However, she moved like a squirrel, and she nimbly dodged the skeleton's attacks. Unfortunately, it felt like she was only concentrating on dodging, so she wasn't able to counter-attack effectively. However, Kim-gyushik covered that deficiency very well. Once Shinsoyool lured the skeleton, Kim-gyushik took advantage of their exposed weaknesses. Their movements complemented each other, and they were able to become a great tag team. They seem to have a lot of talent for fighting.

Noguduk felt relieved when he saw the front group fight well. This in turn made him worry about how long the back line could last. The width of the stairway wasn't that narrow, so if numerous enemies bum-rushed Lee-junghwan then he wouldn't be able to block them by himself.

That was what he thought.

"...he's blocking them pretty well."

Ddak! Ddak! Ddak! Ddak! (TLN: sound of stick hitting hard surface)

As if he was mocking Noguduk's worries, Lee-junghwan was admirably carrying out his duty. Lee-junghwan stood proudly on top of the stairs. The skeletons were climbing up as if they were reaching for a finish line and he touched the skeleton's skull in order of arrival as a reward. Instead of his hands, he used his heavy spear.

If he hadn't seen the fierce battle at the front line, he might have thought "is he trying to film a comedy?"

Ddak!

The skulls let out a heavy sound, and for awhile, he blankly stared at the skeletons roll busily down the stairs. Noguduk wore an expression of disbelief, while he mumbled.

"This isn't a whack-a-mole... Do those things have any intelligence? Their

action is so stupid... Ah, they don't. Jeez."

However, Lee-junghwan, who was easily deflecting the skeletons, had a rather poor expression.

"I won't last long. Uncle. Tell Yoo-hweeji or Che-nayun to come here."

"Huh? You are blocking them well, so what are you talking about? Just take care of them one by one."

"No. I can't take care of them. Moreover, there are too many of them."

Noguduk couldn't understand his words, so he carefully stuck his head out to see below the stairs. He saw a crowd of white bones below, and Noguduk stopped breathing. 30? 40? He couldn't count them. He didn't know where that many skeletons had popped up from the first floor. It would be impossible to block them. It was a matter of time before the rear was pierced. (tln: almost went with penetrated but the phrasing >.<)

"I'm buying time by hitting their heads, but most of them won't die from a single blow. With my strength, it is hard for me to break the skull. They are harder than I thought. I don't have Kim-gyushik's idiotic power."

Kim-gyushik had easily turned the hard skulls into powder, but it seemed like only he could do this. Noguduk quickly nodded his head. He ran and brought back Che-nayun. He wanted to bring Yoon-hweeji, but after Ha-taegyong heard his explanation, he said Che-nayun needed some combat experience. So he was forced to bring Che-nayun, who didn't want to come.

"Heeeeeek! Mommy!"

After she saw the swarming group of skeletons, she had a fit and she reflexively leaned backwards. Her face had turned white, and there were unshed tears welling in her eyes. She seemed to have a very cowardly personality. Noguduk tried his best not to show his exasperation.

"Do you know how to use that wand? Just used it like Hwang-gijong. Can you use a fire ball? Over there~ Just aim for the middle and Boom! Just do that."

"Sob! I, I can't do it. I don't have a wand that could do that. Moreover, what would I do if the other side rushed me? Is uncle going to take responsibility?"

For a moment, he was about to say 'I guess so.', but he held back. Then he started to gently coax her with his words.

"Didn't you say this test is really important? Do you know how many there are over there? Just blow them away with a big hit. If so, the MVP will be in your bag."

He didn't know if there really was an MVP award. First, he had to convince her so he spoke something that might get through to her. Che-nayun's eyes, which was about to shed water, suddenly changed.

"MVP... Yes... This might be my opportunity."

"R, right?"

Are all women like this? She raised her eyes, which was filled with fire, then she slowly walked towards where Lee-junghwan was located at. Lee-junghwan didn't notice the change within her, so he got irritated with her. He didn't even turn to look at her.

"What? If you are going to cry then fuck off."

"Hoong.(TLN: hmmph!) Who are you to tell me whether to fuck off or not? Just move."

Lee-junghwan, who only moved at his own pace, was suppressed by Che-nayun. Her attitude had changed 180 degree in a brief amount of time. Lee-junghwan hesitated while he was at a loss for words. Che-nayun flinched and shook when she faced the skeletons swarming from behind, but soon her eyes were emitting a dignified malice. Then she shouted her unique spell with a high pitched voice.

"Magic cannon! Magic cannon! Magic cannon! Magic cannon! Magic cannon! Sweep them all away!"

Kwang! Kwang! Kwa-ahng! Kwa-kwa-kwang! (TLN: explosion sfx)

Purple colored spheres rose above Che-nayun's head, and after a slight delay, they scored a direct hit on the swarm of skeletons. For a moment, the spectacular sight made one to be mesmerized. The dangerous spheres held magic, and every time it landed, five to six skeletons were destroyed into mush.

The powdered bone rose up like dust, and the bones scattered in all directions. In midst of all of this, Che-nayun cackled like a crazy bitch.

“Huff! Huff! Hoho, huff! Ho... Yes, this is it! Hee! Hee! Pheww! I’m, I’m about to die.”

She was having a hard time breathing as if she had run a full marathon, but the light of pleasure still shown through. She deserved to feel that way since only about 4 skeletons were left moving after the cloud of bone dust had settled down. Che-nayun had shot the magical bullets and usually it was powerful enough to easily pierce through one or two enemies. However, they were densely packed in a single location, so she was able to sweep them away with a single stroke.

It was like blasting a shotgun at a cluster of balloons.

Lee-junghwan and Noguduk looked at Che-nayun again with new eyes. Her actions were somewhat unreliable, so they hadn’t expected much from her. However, she was able to show her surprising skill with the small wand. Noguduk expected her power to be similar to Hwang-gijung, so he couldn’t close his gaping mouth.

“This, this is magic? It is too different from Hwang-gijong!”

“I guess it’s the difference in talent.”

In a word, the dish is different. (TLN: it’s a figure of speech-regular dish vs quality dish) Hwang-gijung was exhausted after releasing merely one charged magic. Che-nayun had used five consecutive spells. The difference between the two was clear. When the draft ends, talent will greatly sway the social standing. He didn’t even need to say who will have a higher standing. From the outset, the starting line differed. (TLN: if you are more talented, you have a head start)

Still, Lee-junghwan didn’t expect the immature Che-nayun to have this kind of strength. The phrase you can’t judge a book by its cover was made exactly for Che-nayun.

Lee-junghwan clicked his tongue briefly, and he rushed towards the leftover skeletons with his hand axes raised high.

The last skeleton finally crumbled, and the 2nd floor exploration came to an

end. Ha-taegyong looked at the out of breath party members with a slightly tired eyes. He carefully took stock of the damage.

“One dead. Two exhausted... No, one. Two with minor injuries.”

Hwang-gijung waved his hand in an exaggerated manner to indicate he could still fight, so Ha-taegyong changed his words, while nodding his head. Che-nayun still couldn't stand up so she sat down while leaning against Yoo-hweeji's body. They had earned their first victory in battle, but they didn't show any signs of being happy.

After losing consciousness, Park-junghwan was exempt from the battle, but he eventually succumbed to his death. Hwang-gijung looked at the corpse that had changed to blue. He belatedly learned that poison was applied to the trap. Maybe, if they had immediately cut off the limb, which was stuck in the trap, then maybe he would have survived. However, it was pointless to think about it now since he was dead.

He was a comrade who had walked and moved not too long ago. Now he was a stinking corpse lying on the floor, so everyone was shaken by this. However, they had all come here after forming some resolve, so there weren't anyone who was too shocked by this. Even Che-nayun, who wasn't immune to these kind of situations, breathed quietly, and she didn't freak out. She must still be running on fumes.

Instead, the one who looked the saddest was Yoon-hweeji. She was the one who wanted to stay back with Park-junghwan.

“...I didn't think things through. I dropped out, while only thinking of myself. I want to give a sincere apology to everyone.”

If even one person was unable to perform their duty, anyone was liable to become like Park-junghwan. She had come to realize this. Even Noguduk, who she secretly thought of as a non-combatant, ran around busily. Yoon-hweeji was honest in acknowledging her error. Even Ha-taegyong, who had argued with her, accepted her apology with a calm expression.

“I'm sure everyone had felt this, but we came here prepared. He had enough information. However, once the battle started, everyone basically became a rag-tag group. You were all careless and afraid. You weren't in control.”

He didn't point anyone out, but several people flinched like a thief caught in the act. Park-junghwan had died because of his appalling carelessness. Hwang-gijong ignored their battle formation, and he ran towards the patient, who became injured. Yoon-hweeji acted however she wanted, and Che-nayun fell into a panicked state. Even if they had ten mouths, they had nothing to say.

"It isn't too late. Let us all renew our resolve. We really might die here. You all don't want to die in a place like this, right?"

Someone sighed, and the sound of a breath leaking was heard. Ha-taegyong stealthily turned toward where the breath was leaked, and he continued speaking.

"Let's talk about the draft. My thoughts on the skeleton is... I think they were buried in the walls. Look at this."

Everyone's gaze turned toward Ha-taegyong's right hand, which was bobbing up and down. His hand was holding a broken piece of bone.

"There are calcium powder and dirt on the piece of bone. The builder of the tower probably encased people inside and he buried them with dirt. Then he probably whitewashed the wall. I'm not sure if they were buried alive."

"So that is why there weren't anything on the first floor. They were hiding within the walls. After we went up to the second floor, did the bastards feint an attack?"

"I don't think so. I don't think they have that much intelligence."

At those words, Noguduk agreed with him, while disingenuously saying "Ok. Ok. They are retarded."

"This is only my opinion, but... These bastards seem to be sensitive toward sound. During the battle at the front line, they seem to gather around Mr. Kim-gyushik, who was the only one making loud noises."

"Mmm. Did that happen? Now that you say it, it did seem like that."

"It should be correct. The skeletons on the first floor woke up when Mr. Kim-gyushik stamped his mace on the floor. The sound that rang out might be culprit? The bastards that woke up probably wanted to find the source of the

sound, so they rushed towards the second floor.”

“So it was my fault they attacked like a pack of dogs?”

Kim-gyushik’s face became red, and steam started coming out of his nose.

“I’m not saying that. It is a characteristic of mid-sized weapons, so we can’t do anything about it. (TLN: heavier weapons = more noise) To resume my story, the 2nd floor enemies probably reacted to Mr. Park-junghwan’s scream when he got caught in the trap. To summarize, these bastards react to sounds, but they won’t react to the level of noise like footsteps. Moreover, they move tenaciously, but they could be stopped if their skull is destroyed. Lastly... They were buried in a soft wall since they weren’t able to break out with their own efforts. They were asleep. ”

Ha-taegyong finished his explanation with a meaningful smile. There were 3 reactions. Most of them thought, “So what?” or they agreed without any thoughts on it. However, there were those who sensed there was a hidden meaning to his words, and they had enough sense to wonder about it. When they understood his meaning, their eyes widened in surprise. These were the smart minority.

Clap!

As if she had understood something, Yoon-hweeji clapped her hand then she stood up. She was part of the small minority.

“So that’s it! If we are able to find out which wall the skeletons are buried in....!”

“Yes. We’ll be able to destroy every one of them before the bastards wake up. We won’t have any losses.”

In short, the skeletons do not react to small sounds. He wanted to pierce each skull of the skeletons buried within the wall. The people who had finally understood Ha-taegyong’s plan repeatedly admired him, and they propped up Ha-taegyong.

“Ooh-waaaa! There is such a method! We won’t have to fight like before if we use this method!”

“Of course, he is the leader. People should always use their heads!”

Ha-taegyong ignored the jubilation, and he turned his gaze towards Kim-jungin. Kim-jungin continuously had his eyes on Ha-taegyong, so their eyes met. Ha-taegyong had a peculiar smile, and Kim-jungin maintained his cool demeanor. It lasted for a brief moment, but something surged between the two. Eventually, Ha-taegyong opened his mouth, and he still had a hint of a smile on his lip.

“If you look closely at the walls, you will probably be able to find where the bastards are buried. I think Mr. Kim-jungin should catch them. We have to get rid of them, while making the least amount of noise. It’ll be hard to find someone more suited for this task than Mr. Kim-jungin. Miss Shinsoyool is lacking in strength, and I don’t think Mr. Kim-gyushik could easily control his strength.”

“I understand. I’ll do it.”

“No! I can also do it! We just have to put a hole through their forehead?”

Since Kim-jungin was given an important mission, Kim-gyushik felt a competitive spirit towards him. This was why Kim-gyushik quickly volunteered himself. However, Ha-taegyong shook his head from side to side.

“Strength is not the only requirement. One has to be able to accurately pierce the plaster and the skull in one pass. Also, the deeply embedded sword needs to be extracted without making any sound. If the aim is a little bit off, then they’ll wake up and raise hell. Mr Kim-gyushik’s style doesn’t emphasize technique. Even if you could do it, Mr. Kim-gyushik should prepare for unexpected events. You should stay ready in the back.”

His words were logical, but it oddly felt like there was a overtone of him trying to pigeon-hole Kim-jungin as a guy that only ‘uses technique.’ (TLN: ex. in sports you get labeled as a finesse player) Kim-jungin, the person directly involved, didn’t seem to have noticed it. He listened indifferently, but Yoon-hweeji, who was quietly listening from the side, couldn’t do the same. She had clearly witnessed his brilliant exploit, so she felt a bit of reverence towards him.

‘If it wasn’t for his exploits, we wouldn’t have ended with only this much loss. However, that man, Ha-taegyong....!’ (TLN: She thinks Ha-taegyong is trying to downplay Kim-jungin’s accomplishments)

Yoon-hweeji was about to express her dissatisfaction, but someone else spoke first.

“I think I can handle doing that.”

Chapter 6

2# Draft

Lee-junghwan approached them, while twirling his hand axes.

“Well, it’ll be a bit difficult. Wouldn’t it be too slow if he is catching them one by one? It would a bit better if I participated.”

Ha-taegyong felt a little bit of displeasure, but he didn’t flatly reject the idea.

“Mr. Lee-junghwan is part of the rear group. If we aren’t able to eliminate all of them, then they might attack us from the back.”

“Let Shinsoyool be in charge of that. Originally, she was also part of the rear group. Moreover, we lost one person. Wouldn’t it be obvious to change our formation?”

Lee-junghwan spoke while looking at a certain direction. Ha-taegyong followed his gaze, and he briefly looked towards that direction. He quickly turned his body, while he continued to have a dissatisfied expression.

“...we’ll do it your way. Mr. Noguduk.”

He was bored, so he was about to yawn with his mouth open. Noguduk was surprised when his name was suddenly called.

“Uh, uh! I’m here!”

“Please take the rear with Ms. Shinsoyool. Also, please use Mr. Park-junghwan’s cloth to soak up the spilled oil. We might need to make a torch later.”

“O, ok! If it’s that much I can do it!”

He was told to take care of the rear. These words meant that Noguduk was accepted into the group. He interpreted it that way, so he got up and dusted himself off, while smiling. He started to cheerfully take off Park-junghwan’s outer cloth. Several people looked on with dumbfounded gazes. He didn’t care if he was given the chore of taking off a corpse’s clothes and wiping the floor with it.

Anyways, it was important for him to be accepted as an official 'member'. At the very least, he earned a safeguard. (TLN: meaning he won't be abandoned)

'That bastard, Ha-taegyong, has a good eye. He probably won't leave behind a comrade. Ah, why won't it come off?'

Noguduk was trying his best to push down the laughter that was about to come out automatically, and he busily moved his hands.

In the end, the plan devised by Ha-taegyong was a big success. They had passed the skeletons before without noticing them, but now they were aware that the skeletons were hidden. They strained their eyes and they searched various locations. They were able to find slight bumps protruding from the wall's surface, and their eyes picked up the details.

Some parts of the wall were sloppily made. Between the roughly painted lime stones, one could faintly see the outline of kneecaps or skulls. If the corpse were entirely buried then the skeletons would instead be mummies. (TLN: completely sealed in wall == mummy)

The party swept through the second floor then they rapidly headed toward the 3rd floor. The 3rd floor was similarly structured. Kim-jungin and Lee-junghwan were skilled at their repetitive job, and they punctured holes into the wall at a frightening pace. They looked like farmers cutting down dry sorghums with scythes.

The two people's harvest continued to increase, and this allowed the group to explore the floor a little more closely. If they had noticed the existence of skeletons on the first floor, then they would have come up with a better way to deal with them. Therefore, everyone concentrated so they wouldn't even miss a strand of hay. This resulted in them getting similar result to what they got in the second floor.

The rewards was one sturdy looking large tower shield, and couple mysterious recorded pages written in the official language of the Square. They were only able to pick weapons in the ready room, so they were short on defensive gears. The tower shield, which could cover the entire body, was like precious rain coming down in a drought. However, this sentiment wasn't shared by one person.

‘Shit. This is basically like marching in the army, while carrying the army gear... Damn asshole.’

Noguduk was carrying the tower shield like a turtle carrying its shell, and he continuously complained. It was great that they were able to get the tower shield, but there were limited amount of people who could use it. By a process of elimination, people who lacked physical strength or those who relied on their speed could not use this item. The wand users needed to conserve their stamina, and others were eliminated for various reasons. So only Kimgyushik and Noguduk was left. Kimgyushik was also excluded since he carried a heavy mace. This was the explanation on why Noguduk was carrying the tower shield on his back. Moreover, Kimgyushik piled on by saying he should think of it as carrying military gear. He said it to comfort him, but it made him angrier when he realized the muscle brained bastard really meant what he said.

He was really tired and he couldn't just throw the shield away since Noguduk's position in the group was too low. No one really cared whether he was there or not, so no one considered his suffering. At least, he had some closeness to Shinsoyool so she had asked if he was ok. However, it didn't lessen the tower shield's weight.

Also, the others were occupied in reading the unidentified records.

[.....this was how Galruhen chased after the followers. He personally led the army to the Amutar wasteland.....]

[....several hundred followers were taken prisoner, and all their hearts were ripped out.... Galruhen wanted to set an example of them. This lead to several hundred corpse being sealed in the middle of the wasteland, where a Skeleton Tower was raised... Galruhen became a symbol of terror through this cruel and heartless event.]

[....after losing his precious followers, Malaypilgor visited the Skeleton Tower by himself, while he shed blood and tears. His hands held the 419 hearts of the Galruhen's soldiers. It was the same number as the number of corpse supporting the Skeleton tower. ...the beating hearts were given as sacrifice, and he used the hate-filled cry to cast a spell. He was finally able to call the departed to the surface.Malraypigor didn't stop there and he ushered in more dreadful

creatures....]

“A Skeleton Tower. This records is about the origin of this tower. The author isn't named.”

“I think so. I'm a little worried about the last words.”

“Me too. He said there were more dreadful creature here, so I wonder which monster will come out.....”

“Maybe, it is waiting for the man called Malraypigor. Anyways, we should be careful.”

Ha-taegyong and Yoon-hweeji exchanged their opinions for awhile, and they tried to glean any information from the records. However, the record didn't contain many useful information so they weren't able to gain anything. They were able to confirm an obvious truth. It was the fact that the next floor contained a more dangerous creature.

...and the danger came faster than expected.

The 4th floor was different from the other 3 floors they had explored. There weren't a single partition or a pillar present. It was a large joint space. There was a perfect calm inside the room, and there weren't even a sliver of light coming in from outside. It was obvious that only darkness was surrounding this space and the party greeted an unknown danger that was hidden within the depth. One or two people climbed the stairway, and they broke the enormous silence wrapping around the room. After they all entered the room, everyone frowned at the same time as if they had promised to do it beforehand.

The place smelled like a milk carton past its expiration date by couple weeks. The rotten smell assaulted their noses and the pungent smell made one almost faint. The weak-stomached people retched one after another, because the smell was so bad.

“Fuck. It smells like shit.hup?”

“What is it?”

Kimgyushik was walking in the front when his breath leaked out. Accompanying the sound, he suddenly came to a stop. Shinsoyool was walking

by his side with her fingers pinching her nose. She also stopped, and she spoke in a nasally tone. However, Kimgyushik didn't reply back. He continued to look forward, while his body was frozen stiff like a piece of wood.

Foot. There was a massive foot there. Couple dozens of bones that might be from the arms or legs were entwined together. It deformed to form a shape of a large foot. Above the foot, there was a thick tree-like calf made out of the numerous bones. The lamps dim illumination only allowed one to see this, but it wasn't difficult to guess the size of the monster. They were fortunate that the enormous monster was asleep like the other skeletons.

"Why, why is it so big....."

"My god....."

The party members belatedly realized the size of the monster, so they simultaneously let out a soundless cry. Ha-taegyong ordered a tactical retreat. They didn't have any plans on how to deal with it. The monster wasn't awake right now, but they wanted to prevent a disaster if the monster awoke by mistake.

"That might be the monster mentioned in the records."

"At the very least, it seems to be 4, 5 meters tall. How are we suppose to defeat that?"

No one had anything else to say. Even Ha-taegyong and Yoon-hweeji, who was considered to be the brains of this group, didn't have any suggestions. What could they do to a skeleton that was 5 meters tall? It was questionable whether they would even be able to withstand one kick. The simple minded Kimgyushik wanted to pour magic at it while it was asleep, but Ha-taegyong rejected that idea immediately. Kimgyushik had a hard time accepting this decision, so Ha-taegyong spoke in a calm voice.

"I don't think we should think of it as facing a single monster. Please think about it. We encountered it as soon as we ascended the stairs. The fourth floor is different from the other floors as it only has the outer walls. This location allows the large skeleton to move around freely. In this large space, do you really think there will be only one large skeleton? If so, I think you are being too optimistic."

“To be specific, the record said there are 419 skeletons buried here. If we counted the skeletons we have already disposed, it is less than 200. So where are the remaining skeletons?”

“Ughh.”

Kimgyushik totally bought his explanation, so he feebly caved in an instant.

Kim-jungin, who was listening, quietly opened his mouth.

“There might be a way.”

“Huh? Hey, are you for real?”

“...please continue speaking.”

Many meaningful gazes turned toward Kim-jungin. Some gazes were filled with curiosity, and others were filled with anticipation. There was even a gaze filled with admiration, and someone couldn't erase wariness from their gaze.

If one considered Ha-taegyong to be the visible leader that leads the group, then Kim-jungin was the mental pillar the party leaned on. He was the one who took care of the grunt work, and he supported the group from the background. Even if one put aside the trust he had built up from the others, he was someone who lead with his action. So when this man spoke, there was always a good reason behind it.

“This world seems illogical at first, but it must have their own set of rules. Miss Yoo-hweeji.”

“Yes, yes!”

Yoon-hweeji was surprised, so she immediately answered while raising her hand. No one noticed her cute ears had turned particularly red.

“The skeletons have slept for a very long time, and they attacked the intruders by reacting to sounds. According to the records, this was done with a spell. Since Ms. Yoon-hweeji has the most knowledge regarding magic, I'll ask you a question. From a common sense standpoint, is it possible to maintain a summon for a long period of time?”

The moment she heard the question, Yoon-hweeji unconsciously let out a sigh and her slim body shook. She suddenly felt the white fog that was clouding her

mind refresh into a window of clarity. Kim-jungin was talking about the source of magic. He was talking about Power.

Yoon-hweeji put a hand on her chest, and she tried to slow her breathing down. She had felt her heart beat faster before he even spoke. Is it because she received attention from the person she admired? (TLN: notice me senpai~)

‘What is wrong with me.....’

Her large and beautiful eyes looked toward Kim-jungin with complicated emotions. Unfortunately, Kim-jungin wasn’t an emotional man, and he couldn’t understand Yoon-hweeji’s delicate heart. The only thing he returned was a gaze urging her for an explanation. Kim-jungin gave an honest response, but from Yoon-hweeji’s perspective, her pride had taken a big hit.

As one of the best actress, she was on the road to success. There were many men who had eyed her and they had used all sorts of method to woo her. However, she had never shown any interest towards them. She had thought her work was more important. Even though she didn’t have much experience, her female nature hadn’t disappeared.

‘Ha!’

Her high self-esteem was wounded. Suddenly, a cold frost descended on Yoon-hweeji’s beautiful white face. Her eyes, which used to have a bit of amorous light, now showed small signs of anger.

“I don’t know all the detail either. I want to say Mr Kim.Jung.In’s(TLN:speaking his name in a clipped tone) question is impossible to answer. Energy or magical energy has to be continuously provided in a summon. Also, to be more exact, it is difficult to call the skeletons as being summoned. They are forcefully controlled by a spell, and the spell can’t maintain itself. The spell needs a source of magic to be sustained. It needs a power source. For example.... The sacrifice.”

“It is the 419 hearts.”

Ha-taegyon built on Yoon-hweeji’s words, and Kim-jungin started to slowly knead his head again.

“The sacrifice is probably being used as a power source. The evidence is in the change within the 4th floor isn’t just the interior structure.”

“Yes. It’s the rotten smell... If the hearts are being handled by magic then the decomposition may be slowed down in this environment. The sacrifice will have no value if it becomes completely decomposed.”

“So the hearts being used as sacrifice is located somewhere on the 4th floor. If we destroy that then the skeletons will no longer be able to move. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

Her cold attitude was still the same, but Yoon-hweeji replied with an energetic voice.

The role assignments were easy once they had determined their target. Truthfully, it couldn’t even be called assigning. Two people were temporarily transferred to the exploration group. Shin-sooyool and Lee-junghwan, who had fast foot speed, decided to take on these roles. Lastly, they decided to use the lamp light to communicate via signals then they climbed towards the 4th floor.

“Miss Yoon-hweeji?”

“Yes. What is it? Mr Kim.Jung.In?”

“Did I do something wrong?”

“No~pe. You did nothing wrong. I was just irritated at my own delusion.”

“What? Delusion?”

“You don’t need to pay any~ attention to it, Mr Kim.Jung.In. Let’s go.”

Her pretty lips were making a gentle smile, but her words seemed to have sharp thorns within it. Moreover, her attitude towards him was very cold. It was on the same level as the time she had the war of words with Ha-taegyong. Kim-jungin’s expression indicated he had no idea what was going on. He could only blankly look at her, whose back was emitting an icy air.

‘Fuckers. They are making a fuss. Why are they rubbing it in like that at this time?’

Noguduk had watched their antics from start to finish with narrowed eyes. He grabbed his suddenly aching chest, and he shuffled up the stairs. Was it because it suddenly reminded him of his wife, who had left him? (TLN: I guess he is

divorced)

The tower was large, but it took around 20 minutes to circle around it. If one considered the fast foot speed of Shinsoyool and Lee-junghwan, they could reconnaissance it in 10 minutes. 10 minutes. It was a very short amount of time, but the time seemed to stretch out with the frightening large skeleton next to the group.

Soon, the figures of Shinsoyool and Lee-junghwan carrying the lamp was seen at the opposite side of the starting point.

“It’s hard to see without a window. We’ve circled around the edge, but we weren’t able to find the sacrifices. Moreover, there is one more big bastard like that one over there. It is located on the other end of this place.”

“This is an educated guess, but wouldn’t it be in the middle of the hall? This would allow it to spread its energy more easily.”

“That is highly probable. There really aren’t many places to hide it.”

Ha-taegyong also thought Shinsoyool’s view was correct. Normally, that was the standard procedure.(TLN: it is standard procedure to put the energy source in the middle) Anyways, they’ll find out once they get there.

“Please be careful not to make any noises.”

The thread of suspense was taught once again and the group slowly made their way towards the center of the hall. They looked around closely just in case, but the only thing they saw was the moss growing between the stone floor. There weren’t anything that caught their eyes.

They continued to walk for 10 minutes. It was too dark to know their exact location, but they guessed that they were close to the center.

“...there is nothing here. Can anyone detect magic?”

“.....”

No one stepped forward. Of course, Ha-taegyong didn’t ask the question expecting an answer. From the beginning, they were beginners with only rudimentary knowledge, so it wasn’t possible for them to use such techniques. He let out a groan of frustration. They had no choice but to divide into groups.

They had to search the hall with the center as the starting point.

It was at that moment.

Chapter 7

2# Draft

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-Jja-roooooong! Jja-roooooong! (TLN: rrrrinng rrrring)

From out of no where, the sound of an alarm pierced through the silence. The members of the group was using all their concentration in trying to stay covert. The sound wasn't that loud, but it naturally squeezed the hearts of the group members. The group member's face was stupefied, and they desperately tried to find the source of the the sound.

-Goo-ohhhhhhhhh.....

Koong! Koong! (TLN: boom! boom!)

The bastards had woken up. One was in the front and the other was in the back. They had just woken up, but they knew the exact location of the group. Every time the heavy feet hit the surface, the hearts of the party members shook.

"This... It was a deliberate trap."

"Ooh ooh. Then we have no choice but to fight."

"Shit! It eventually turned out this way! Bring it on. I'll crush their skulls like how I did before!"

While everyone was trying to gather themselves, Ha-tageyong quickly came to a decision.

"We should attack them first instead of facing both those bastards at the same time. Let us take care of the one near the entrance. The one we saw when we first came up. We have to keep the option of a retreat open. Excluding Mr Noguduk and Ms Ahn-haemi, everyone will be inserted into the close combat group. Mr Hwang-gijong and Che-nayun are the reserves. Miss Yoon-hweeji and I will attack first. The rest of you guys move after our attack ends. Let's go. Miss Ahn-hamei, take the front."

“Understood.”

Ahn-haemi took the lamp, and she took a deep breath. Then she kicked off the ground. She followed the prearranged procedure of illuminating the surrounding. She was constantly on the move to shine the light, so the other party members can continue on fighting. This allowed her to be the first one to truly see the enemy.

“.....!”

Ahn-haemi almost fell when strength left her lower legs. She gritted her teeth, and she continued to run straight at it. As the distance between the bastard contracted, its bizarre appearance became clearer.

When she saw the large skeleton up close, it was giving off an imposing feeling. The foot and leg they saw earlier didn't need to be described. The thick arm and body was formed from a collection of bones. It had limbs like a human, but the body was short compared to the arms and legs. The general shape was very bizarre. The head that should be attached at the end was placed too high, and the lamp wasn't able to illuminate it.

“Frozen Spear! Frozen Spear!”

Large icicles formed above Ha-taegyong's head, and it shot forward, while bluish light glimmered off of it. The target was its left arm. The sharp icicles couldn't penetrate the sturdy bone, but it rapidly froze the surrounding. From the start, Ha-taegyong wanted to disable the left arm by aiming for the elbow and wrist joints.

“Wind blade!magic cannon! Magic cannon!”

On the other hand, the Wind blade shot by Yoon-hweeji only made numerous cuts before passing by. It stopped after making superficial injuries to the external skeleton. The attack basically tickled the bastard. Of course, the smart Yoon-hweeji knew about this. When she saw the large skeleton for the first time, she had postulated that the her Wind Blade was insufficient in facing it. Therefore, she came prepared with something she borrowed from Hwang-gijung. It was the wand charged with the magic, Magic Cannon. She couldn't disable the entire arm like Ha-taegyong, but she couldn't at least limit its movement.

Yoon-hweeji paused for a moment to allow the close combat fighters to approach it, then she timed the Magic Cannon.

Boom! Boom!

The Magic Cannon exploded consecutively behind the back of its knee. It couldn't handle its big body, and it staggered to its knee. Her plan worked perfectly and Yoon-hweeji made a nice pose by making a fist. The only thing left was to finish it before it could join up with the other bastard.

This would be taken care by the people running in.

“Ooryaaaaaap!”

The first one who ran in was Kim-gyushik. When he saw the bastard's unguarded knee, his eyes shown like a wild beast, who had found its prey. He raised both his hands above his head and he struck down like he was swing an iron pick.

Kwa-ji-ji-jeek! (TLN: crunch!)

No matter how many layer of bones were stacked together, it couldn't withstand the full swing of Kim-gyushik's mace. He partially destroyed the knee with one strike. He growled roughly, then he poured his strength into the muscles in his arms. He wanted to cripple the bastard with the next attack.

However, Kim-gyushik was the only one making an encouraging effort. The others weren't able to pull off a proper attack. It wasn't that they were lacking in skills, but their weapons were the main cause. If they had the specialized 'destructive' style of Kim-gyushik then it wouldn't have been a problem. However, Shin-soyool's small sword, Lee-junghwan's hand axes and Kim-jungin's sword were thin weapons and it couldn't pierce through the bastard's bones. The only thing they could do was to focus their attack on one location like a woodcutter.

‘This isn't good.’

If this continued, the opportunity created by Ha-taegyong and Yoon-hweeji would disappear like bursting bubbles. No, as more time passes, it was guaranteed that they would fall without being able to do anything when those bastards meet up with each other.

This won't do. This was what Kim-jungin thought. He stared hard into the darkness. He couldn't see it clearly, but he aimed for the bastard's head.

'Up until now, the head was the weakness of all the skeletons. This bastard shouldn't be any different.'

He could see Kim-gyushik diligently attacking it. Above him, its enormous leg was tilted to one side. Its thick arm was draped across its thigh. He could clearly see the distinct shape of the broad shoulders attached at the top. He could see a route being drawn to the top. At this moment, only Kim-jungin could see and feel the route.

Kim-jungin started to run in place. His body was lighter than ever before, and he felt as if he could cut through anything with his sword. Maybe if he jumped, he could reach the sky? This was how he felt at that moment, and his body readied itself to make a large leap.

"Uh?"

He stepped on Kim-gyushik's shoulder.

"Mr Kim-jungin!"

He stepped on the bastard's thighs then he jumped again to its forearm.

"My god....!"

He had leapt a distance larger than 3 meters and he had landed on the shoulder in one try. The bastard's skull was close. If he put a big hole in the middle, then this would end.

However.

"The sacrifices...?"

The bastard's head wasn't shaped like a intact skull. The bone was shaped like a bowl, and there were pulpy brown shapes contained within it. 100? 200? He couldn't count the number of hearts inside the giant bowl. Instead of a beating heart, they looked like rotten chunks of meat.

The foul smell made him want to cut off his nose, but Kim-jungin remained calm. However, his insides were churning.

‘How am I suppose to get rid of that...?’

He couldn’t ladle it out nor could he cut every single one of them.

-Kooooooooohhhhhh!

The shoulder he was using as a stepping stone tilted, and Kim-jungin couldn’t continue his thoughts. The bastard had started moving again. From beneath, he could hear a scream rip out.

“Kyaaaaaaaaahk! They are all here! They are here! Die! Magic Cannon!”

“Calm down! Everyone assemble in one place.”

The situation was going downhill fast. The bastard that was approaching from the other side didn’t show up by itself. There several dozen skeletons in its vicinity. It presented itself like a king with an escort. This one was slightly larger than the one Kim-Jungin was standing on. The giant skeleton raised its arm, and it easily blocked Che-nayun’s attack. Then it let out roar that could burst an eardrum.

-Kwaaaaaaaaoooooh—-!

“Ooahhhhhk!”

The bastard’s roar contained murderous intent and it was a form of mental attack. The mental attack was dyed with a horrific murderous intent and it impacted the nerves of the brain. It was like throwing cold water on a shrinking fighting spirit. Hwang-gijong, who was already in a bad state, started vomiting blood. Noguduk’s body started trembling like an aspen leaf, and he shrunk into the shield as if he had turned into a real turtle. Che-nayun had foam coming out of her mouth, and her eyes rolled back. Then she fell onto the floor with a thump. The others avoided showing such a disgraceful figure, but their faces were drained of blood. They must have received a great amount of shock.

“Hey! Kim-jungin! What are you doing there! Don’t just stand there! End it now!”

Kim-gyushik’s husky voice rang out after he took care of a skeleton that had ran in.

“The sacrifices are on top of its head!”

“What....!”

The party members Kim-gyushik, Lee-junghwan, Shin-soyool and Ahn-haemi formed a square formation, and they fought desperately to protect the rest of the party members, who were unable to fight. However, they wouldn't be able to last long. They were somehow able to get rid of the skeletons, but the large skeletons from both sides started to move. If one of the bastards reach the center of the square formation then the people, who couldn't keep steady, would be ground into mince meat. No, this wasn't just a possibility. It was only a matter of time.

The bastards were getting closer, but they had no solution to the problem. Should they aim the Frozen Spear or Wind Cutter at its head? Unfortunately, Ha-Taegyong and Yoon-hweeji's control over their ability was insufficient and it didn't allow for complex maneuvers. The party had no way to attack the monster's head, which was located on the highest point on a monster 4-5 meters tall. Kim-jungin was able to run atop of it, but the others didn't even dare to try the same maneuver.

“What should we do? What are we suppose to do! Ggoo-ahh-hap!” (TLN: just a sfx of an indecipherable groan)

“Shit. Stop being so noisy.”

Lee-junghwan let out a rare curse word (TLN: meaning he doesn't usually swear), and he revealed his anxious state of mind. Yoon-hweeji, who was keeping the balance within the square formation, gnawed on her nails as ominous shadows ambushed her from time to time. The giant skeletons foot came down with a “boom!”, and the bone fragments were flung right in front of them. This meant it was right in front of them. She laboriously pushed her body to stand, then she yelled at the top of her voice.

“Mr Kim-Jungin! Use the sword to root out the head! Do something! We'll all die if this continues!”

Tear and despair were mixed into her voice. From long before, Kim-jungin had already started using his sword as if he making a porridge. The fragments of the hearts were swept all around and fragments flew out, but the movement of the skeleton hadn't changed. (TLN: his sword acted as a ladle)

“Ahhhhhhhk!”

Eventually, the square formation broke. The first victim was Shin-soyool. A skeleton crawled towards her with only its upper body left. However, the source of her trouble was that she didn't notice it. The blunt blade sank into her thigh, and blood started fountaining out. The surface of her jean started turning red. Her skill was in stylishly avoiding numerous attacks, yet her talent was useless now since her leg was severely injured. To make matters worse, the skeleton felt her slow down so they redoubled their attacks. Shin-soyool fell backward as she was backpedaling.

“Ah ah.....”

The light in her eyes dimmed as she saw the skeletons crowd her vision. Suddenly, a large shadow came into view, and it(TLN:the shadow) covered her white face.

“Ooh-ahhhhhhhhhh—-!”

Boom!

He charged in like a boar, while he covered his entire body with the heavy tower shield. His charge had pushed back the skeletons. This person was none other than Noguduk. Noguduk squeezed out all his strength to push the skeletons, and he shouted with a red face.

“What are you doing! Hurry up and go inside! Do you want to die!”

“U, uncle....?”

“Ah, jeez! Go in! I'm about to die from exhaustion!”

She was jolted into action after hearing his continuous shouts, then she started to laboriously move her body. However, she didn't head towards the center of the square formation. She limped toward Noguduk's back, who was sweating buckets.

‘This is how I die.’

The bastards tirelessly attacked the front of the shield. He gritted his teeth, while blocking them. However, he could feel his body being slowly pushed backwards. His strength eventually hit a limit. If these stupid bastards didn't

insist on attacking only from the front, then he would have already been stabbed with a blade. This was why he was able to put up a good fight even if it was only for a moment.

‘At least, my death won’t be unsightly... huh?’

In his own way, Noguduk was getting ready for an acceptable way to end his life, but he suddenly felt a warm sensation on his back. He hurriedly turned his head to look behind him. A pale faced Shin-soyool was standing there, while she breathed shallowly. He couldn’t believe it when he saw her behind him. He obviously assumed she had retreated to the rear.

“Hey! Insolent girl! Why didn’t you listen to me!”

Shin-soyool put on a tragic smile.

“We are going to die anyways if things continue on this way. Does it matter if I die later or earlier? I don’t like being in debt. Even if I’m going to die, I’ll pay my debts.”

“You....!”

“Ah, uncle! Front! Front! Kyahhhhk!”

Too-kwa-ah-ahng! (TLN: sfx boom mixed in with metallic noise)

For a moment, Noguduk felt his body float in the air. What had happened? The last thing he heard was a sound similar to a bomb going off. He was in a state of weightlessness, and his consciousness became faint. Then he suddenly had a question.

‘I should be holding the shield, so why are my hands so light?’

Then, his consciousness returned. The first thing he felt was an extreme amount of pain. It felt like his body was being ripped apart by a brick.

“Ggahhhhhhhhhhh—!”

Both of his arms were broken. It was bent in an odd angle, and white bone protruded from the break. The shield was terribly crushed, and it had flown away to a distant location. His intestines felt like it had knotted up several times. Every time he tried to breath, the pain made it feel like his guts was about to be severed. He couldn’t sit up, so his back must have been broken. He thought

maybe couple of his ribs had also broken. An undertaker would run happily towards him when it saw his half dead body.

Even if it was a sneak attack, how could he become like this from just one blow? Noguduk realized he had picked a fight with an absurd monster, and a false laughter came out.

“Koo-ha, ha... Mother fucker.... It was a sneak attack?”

“U, uncle....”

He heard a whisper from his side. It was Shin-soyool. She must have been tangled up with him, because she had stood behind him. Noguduk tried his best to turn his head, but his stiff body wouldn't cooperate.

“You... Are you okay....?”

“...I think I can move. How about you, uncle?”

Her voice started to become clearer, so she seemed to be fine. His body probably acted as a cushion. This was the first time he was thankful for his belly fat. He was able to save at least one person, so he didn't die a dog's death.

“Uncle? Your a, arm.... They are all broken! What's wrong? Open your eyes! Please!”

Shin-soyool had finally been able to see Noguduk in detail, and she felt restless. She even tried slapping his face.(TLN: lol) Noguduk tried to open his heavy eyelids, but it felt as if someone had applied glue to his eyelids. There was no way he could open his eyes.

“Hey. I... don't think I can hang on.”

“What are you saying! You can live! Just open your eyes!”

Drip. Drip. He felt hot liquid fall on his face. He had his eyes closed, but he understood it was Shin-soyool's tears. Noguduk was content with that.

‘I thought no one would cry for me when I died.... This isn't too bad.’

“Listen well... to my words. Lamp... You have it?”

“What? Ah, yes... I have it... Why are you saying this...?”

“If I'm... going to die. I would rather... Let's be bold.... Burn it. In my

possession... I have a cloth soaked in oil... Take that... Pour all the oil from the lamp on it... Then start a fire. Those bastards... Maybe... They might be weak to fire.”

“What are...!”

“..don’t argue with me. Hurry.”

His voice was almost gone, but his last words were clear and peaceful. After finishing those words, Noguduk didn’t open his mouth any further. The face with his eyes close hadn’t changed, but the breathing noise coming from his nose was getting weaker.

She dumbly stared down at him, while she was supporting his head. She slowly placed his head on the floor. She was careful not to hurt him. Then she took out Park-junghwan’s outer cloth from his bosom. Originally, he had soaked the cloth with oil to use it as a torch.

Eventually, she carefully hugged it to herself, while grasping it firmly with her fists. She ignored the pain from her leg, then she started running towards an unknown destination.

Chapter 8

3# Race Selection, Orc

His forehead felt as if a rock was placed on top and his head hurt. His mind was fuzzy as if he taken an excessive amount of anesthetic. His body didn't feel like his own body.

‘Didn't I feel like this not too long ago...?’

From across his consciousness, he felt a weird sensation of deja vu. Then his inner self and his sensory system communicated with each other. He felt some kind of a block starting to recede. At the same time, the memories that seemed to have been held back started to pour out to the front.

“Ooh, ooh.....”

He had woken up in an unidentified room and he met strangers there. Then he moved to a weird tower, and he had fought against scary monsters. No, instead of fighting, he observed from the back.... However, it didn't matter. At the end, a skeleton monster that might show up in a SF movie appeared. It was as big as a house, and its punch crippled him.

‘Still my end was good. I was a good person.’

After his wife and children ran away, he had worried that no one would mourn for him if he died. If they did set up a table(TLN:Korean funeral involves preparing a table with food/alcohol/incense and a picture of the deceased where people can give respect to the dead) for him, his customers and the people coming out of courtesy would probably show up. He tried to downplay it, but he couldn't help but have an empty space inside his heart. His fortune was like that, but a college student in the flower of her youth had cried a few tears for him. It was more extravagant than walking the road to the afterlife wearing a pearl necklace.

‘It was a dream... Wait, was it a nightmare? Was it a pig's dream? Or a dog's dream?’ (TLN: when one dreams a weird/irrational dream that doesn't make

sense, the most common phrase used is dog's dream or Gae-ggoom)

He was thinking about such nonsense, when he felt someone shake his body from his side. The person carefully grabbed his shoulder, and shook him. It seemed like the person was trying to wake him up, but the person wasn't aggressive, but cautious. Noguduk thought that if he opened his eyes then the gentle touch would disappear. Therefore, he ignored everything and he shut his eyes tighter.

'Do they pick nurses on how well they massage?'

The owner of the hand, who was trying to wake him up, shook him for awhile. As the person directly involved didn't move an inch, the hand fell away from his body as if the person had become tired. He couldn't hide his regret when the trace of the other person grew distant. Then he heard a sharp intake of breath, and he heard an ear-piercing voice.

"U—n—cle—! How long are you going to sleep! Please wake up!"

"Ooh-huuuuuuk!"

The sharp voice passed by after mercilessly raking across his tender eardrums. After he suffered the unexpected attack, Noguduk raised his upper body, while he let out a big yell. His head was ringing, and it felt like a grandfather clock was ringing inside his skull.

"Wa! You woke up. Are you hurting anywhere?"

What kind of crazy hospital was this! Bring the director of the hospital! He was about to yell this, but he was struck dumb when he saw the face of the person who was chattering next to him. He had no choice, but to shut his mouth.

"You, you....?"

He stuttered, because he couldn't believe who he was seeing. But then again, the face he wanted to bury inside his memory, as a good memory he dreamed up, was right in front of his eyes, and she was smiling. The meaning of this was clear.

"It...it wasn't a dream?"

"What are you saying? Are you half awake? It's me Soyool. Shin. So. Yool. Even

though we weren't properly introduced, have you already forgotten about me?"

"No... Any ways, why are you so noisy, girl? Don't you know I just woke up? Also, why did you do that to me? What kind of person wakes someone like that?"

"Gosh!(TLN: Uh-muh, uhmuh! => It's something you say when you are suprised) Who are you calling a girl! How can you speak that way to a comrade, who experienced life and death with you?"

"Shit. Life and death my ass! I'm the one who died...."

Noguduk's words trailed off. Shin-soyool grinned as if she was provoking him to speak more.

"Who died?"

"Uh, uh..... What happened to my body? It's unscathed!"

"They told us our body will heal if we pass the draft. ...except if one is dead."

Shin-soyoon sullenly explained as she thought about Park-junghwan. Noguduk was able to survive, while in a coma, because he had tenaciously hung on to his life. If he had crossed the river of Styx before the draft had ended, then he wouldn't have been able to have this unexpected reunion. While the two were having a friendly conversation, the door suddenly opened. Then a man, who was cold like a stone, showed up. It was Lee-junghwan. He spoke with a stiff voice.

"The Scouter is here, so the two of you should come out."

"Chet! Jeez, big brother Junghwan. Uncle just woke up. Why don't you give him some time to rest?"

"Who's your big brother?(TLN:oppa) Also, he's been resting until now. So hurry up and come out."

Before anyone could argue, Lee-junghwan closed the door and left. Even though Lee-junghwan couldn't see her, Shin-soyool stuck out her tongue towards his direction. As if she had no choice, Shin-soyool tugged on Noguduk's sleeve.

"I guess we have to go out. I'll give you a detailed explanation after we leave."

“This sound familiar.”

“Yes?”

“Nothing. Let’s go.”

There was a gray haired man staring at a screen, while he frowned. He had an expression of discomfort, and he let out a sigh. It seemed his work wasn’t proceeding as he intended, so he felt uncomfortable.

“At this rate...”

He was talking to himself at a level where only he could hear it. No one heard what he said. Even if someone did hear him, they would have no idea what he was talking about.

The middle-aged man took his eyes off the screen, and he dusted off his lower body. Earth of the solar system was recently found to be the best place to Farm. He had laboriously picked the best talents, and they were waiting for him to speak. Somehow he felt pleased, and he felt the bad feeling from before disperse a little bit.

‘Especially, that guy.’

His eyes rested on one man. He was the best talent he had found. Since becoming a scout, this man had the potential to become the ‘greatest’ in history. Any scout would drool after reading the specific information written inside his journal. He almost couldn’t stop his hands and feet from shaking from shock.

[Journal Number : K903-32440]

[Name : Kim Jung In]

[Tribe&Race : Human]

[Class : –]

[Talent : Lv6 Swordsmanship(C), Lv5 Holy(UC), Lv4 Magic(UC), Lv4 Luck(R), Lv3 Fire(R), Lv3 Light(R)]

[Characteristics : Reliably Stalwart, Battle Instinct, Seeker of Truth]

It was entirely geared towards battle. He had brutal abilities specialized for fighting. Level 6 was the highest Talent allowed for a human. The fact that he had reached that level meant there weren’t any humans who could match his

talent in Swordsmanship. Moreover, his Attributes were perfect. The one thing he worried about was how far he could develop those Talents. Basically, what was the quality of the bowl(TLN: vessel), which contained these talents? However, this worry was dispelled by his accomplishments in this draft.

If he stays on a straight line and he develops his Talent then what would be the extent of his abilities?

‘He might be a Ten..., no he might exceed that. It is unfortunate that I can’t look further into his journal.’

The Scouter hadn’t picked these talents through his senses. If one considered the necessary materials and human resources needed to travel to a different dimension, it was inefficient to recklessly scout without having some kind of evidence backing up your claim. This was why before the Scouters hands out the Journal numbers, they use their special ability to measure one’s potential. The Scouters did this before they were Empowered and sent to Square. After one arrives at Square, Scouters can’t freely look at other’s Journal. One couldn’t steal other’s Journal information within Square. It was obviously forbidden.

Any ways, the middle aged man called Durian wasn’t stupid enough to let go of such a large fish. If the prospect he found was a high ranking Pick then the Scouter who found the pick would receive a very large sum of money from the Club. Kim-jungin was a non-standard existence. He was literally a bomb. Even if one gave the standard upper-limit price of a prospect, it wouldn’t be nearly enough to attain him. He had a lvl 6 Talent on top of other Talents. Even his attributes were perfect, and his growth potential couldn’t even be guessed. He was a mega prospect, and if he was excluded from the draft, the price would be up to the seller in the Trade Market.

This was the chance to turn his life around. Durian was going to use every method available, so Kim-jungin doesn’t get designated in the Draft. He was going to make an exclusive contract with him as an Agent.

He was filled with anticipation, but it turned out it was a misfire. The middle-aged man frowned while looking at the two people coming in from the hall entrance. To be specific, he was looking at the bald man with a body as big as a mountain.

Noguduk entered the wide hall and he didn't realize someone was glaring at him. He looked at the welcoming faces, and he waved his hand in good spirits.

"Whoa! Everyone is alive? What happened?"

"It is thanks to Mr Noguduk."

Yoon-hweeji faced him and she gave a refreshing smile. Then she lowered her head. Ahn-haemi and Che-nayun also had a smile spread across their faces as if they were thankful. They spoke to him as if they've looked at him in a new light.

"Yo! Uncle! Thank you for the last moment! Well, even if it was a gamble!"

At first, he thought it was a simple well-wishing remark. However, once Kim-gyushik joined in to talk about something he didn't know anything about, he had no choice but to be confused.

"Thanks to me? What are you talking about?"

"Ah, that's right. I totally forgot to tell you. So this was what happened...."

Shin-soyool lightly hit her head, and she told the whole story. She explained what happened up until the Draft had ended, while Noguduk was comatose.

At first, Shin-soyool wanted to follow the direction Noguduk left, and she wanted to pour the remaining lamp oil to make a sea of fire. At the very least, she would be able to avenge Noguduk, and she would be able to burn at least one large skeleton. Shin-soyool asked for the oil, but Ha-taegyong, who had the lamp, refused to give it to her. Inside the dark hall, the lamp was the only source of illumination. Shin-soyool was overrun with emotion, so she argued with him. They were about to meet their end, so she argued what use was the lamp.

At that moment, the haggard Yoon-hweeji was observing the verbal battle, and she came up with a plan. It was to pour the oil on top of the giant skeleton's head and burn it. It was different from what Shin-soyool had planned, but it was a worthwhile gamble. Ha-taegyong and Shin-soyool, who was arguing with each other, thought briefly about it before agreeing with the plan. Ha-taegyong took his cloth off and he wrapped it around the lamp. Then he handed it to Kim-gyushik. Kim-gyushik, who had heard the plan, threw the lamp with all his might to Kim-jungin. Kim-jungin caught it, and he spread the oil soaked cloth all over the head. Then he sparked a flint. A small flame smaller than a pea dropped to

the head, and the bastard's head was swept up in flame. The head started to burn, and the skeleton basically became a large torch. The large skeleton ran around, while it made monstrous noises. Soon, it crumbled to the floor like a sand castle. Even the normal skeletons that was rushing towards them crumbled and about half of them collapsed.

"It was as uncle said. The bastards couldn't do anything against fire. We were using our strongest weapon as a lantern.... We couldn't see what was right in front of us."

"R, really? What about the other one?"

"That bastard was easy. Ah, I stand corrected. If big brother Jung-in and big sister Hweeji wasn't there then it would have be very arduous. I already knew big brother Jung-in was incredible, but big sister Hweeji was also an absolute monster. Even after she used her magic three times, she was able to use big brother Taegyong's wand twice. Big brother Gyushik distracted it from beneath the bastard. Big brother Jung-in used that opportunity to torch its head." (TLN: oppa = big brother, unni = big sister, ex. Jung-in oppa or Hweeji unni)

"Distract it? That wasn't all I did. My right arm was crushed."

"Jeez. It's nothing compared to what happened to uncle. Unlike how you look, Big brother Gyushik is a big crybaby."

"And I'm a monster?"

"Big sister is a monster. A very pretty monster."

Yoon-hweeji laughed bitterly at Shin-soyool's cute innocent act then she looked towards Noguduk again.

"It is as Shin-soyool said. The draft has ended and we are alive. So how did you know about it?"

She asked it nonchalantly, but she couldn't hide the hint of curiosity in the tone of her voice. Noguduk didn't really have anything to say, so he stalled for a moment.

"What, what do you mean?"

"The fact that they were weak against fire."

‘Why are you asking me that? Isn’t this common knowledge for people who played video game in one’s youth? It’s obvious that the zombies or skeletons are easily flammable. How could you guys not know this?’

...he wanted to answer truthfully. However, the two women gazed at him with their round, bright eyes and it was too burdensome. At that moment, an unexpected rope was cast down from across the hall.

“It is basically the egg of Columbus. If we look back, the hints were very clear.”

It was Ha-tageyong, who had been sitting without talking. He seemed to slowly enjoy the gazes directed at him. He pushed his glasses up with his fingers as he kept his composure.

“What do you mean? There were hints?”

“Look at the magic that was stored inside the wand. If we look at that than we have the answer. Ice, Wind, Earth, Magic *etc.* There were wands of various properties we could choose in the preparation room. However, fire was excluded. There weren’t any charged wands that could directly create it. At the time, we were too excited about learning about magic that we overlooked this fact. If we look back at it, it was too unnatural. It was obvious.”

The party members acknowledged Ha-taegyong’s words, and they yelled out praises. Of course, the evidence were mainly deduced by Ha-tageyong, and it was something Noguduk never thought of. However, since the extra information had already been said, he was in a funny position where he just went along with it.

‘I guess him being a show off comes in handy sometimes. Thank you, you ass.’

Noguduk laughed inwardly, and he tried to naturally give the final word on the topic. However, the middle aged man, who had been watching the actions of the group, knocked on the table.

“Ok, gentlemen. Let’s end the small talk?”

“He is Durian. He is the one, who had scouted us. So listen closely.”

Shin-soyool softly whispered in his ear.

“First, let me congratulate all of you on passing the Draft successfully. You are

now worthy to be a member of the Hunters, and you will serve to bring peace to Square. Hmmm... I can see there are people who have questions, so I'll speak briefly about the Draft. The capture of the Bone Tower need not be done as you have done. There are numerous ways to capture it. Of course, the test is geared toward evaluating your abilities. It is as Ha-taegyong said. For example, there were wands with specific attributes, three prepared lamps, skeleton buried in the wall, the Bone golems with their source of magic on top of their head. They were all mechanisms to test your split second decision making, reasoning power, and your use of resources. There is also a system in place to measure your contributions. This is all combined to come up with a grade for you all. Let us look at it."

"Ughh. You are going to post the grades, that is too much...."

Shin-soyool complained in a small voice, but Durian didn't hesitate to swipe his hand. This caused the screen located in the front to show the members; name and ranking.

[411st Draft, 31st Group Ranking]

[1. Kim-jungin]

[2. Yoon-hweeji]

[3. Kim-gyushik]

[4. Ha-taegyong]

[5. Lee-junghwan]

[6. Shin-soyool]

[7. Noguduk]

[8. Che-nayun]

[9. Ahn-haemi]

[10. Hwang-gijong]

"This makes no sense? Why am I in 8th place? Ha, the uncle is in 7th place? Isn't there a problem with this assessment?"

Che-nayun stood up and she started screaming with a red face. The others didn't speak, but the response were tepid regarding the released rankings. No matter what anyone says, one couldn't dispute her talent in magic. She was able to take out several dozen skeletons. At the end, she went down easily so one could understand her lowered ranking, but she couldn't accept being in a lower

ranking than the uncle. She couldn't understand the assessment. Even the beneficiary, Noguduk, was showing clear signs of bewilderment.

However, Durian held a firm attitude like a blade of knife.

"I will hear no objections."

"But....!"

"No ifs, ands, or buts about it. The system's assessment is absolute and not even the top clubs can object to it. This includes the active hunters. In the first place, the journal in your body can be used this way. It records every one of your actions, and it converts your level of contribution."

"It can't be...!"

"Should I tell you my opinion? You were able to blow away several dozen small fries. You only excelled in that one scene. That was it. You failed in controlling your power, and you became exhausted. Thus you were a burden to your team mates. In my assessment, two spells would have been sufficient to get the job done."

"You didn't show an overwhelming performance like Kim-jungin, and neither were you able to continuously fight like Kim-gyushik, Lee-junghwan and Shin-soyool. Your judgement can't even be compared to Ha-taegyong. You are complaining, because you are ranked lower than Noguduk? In the final battle, he was able to save Shin-soyool, and he was able to come up with a plan that turned the tide of the battle. The system decided his level of contribution was higher than you. If the system says it, then it is so."

At his severe criticism, Che-nayun sunk completely. She still had an aggrieved face, but Durian wasn't a nice professor who would change the already released grades.

"We've talked about too much nonsense. Let us get back to the main topic. I'm sure all of you had various thoughts, while going through the draft. Some might have gained confidence, and some became discouraged. The life of a hunter is greatly influenced by talent. Originally, talent is something you are born with so it is impossible to artificially manipulate it. If all of you stayed on earth, then you would have lived using your inborn talent. Square isn't too different from that...

You have an opportunity. Within the condition of an empowered human passing the draft, one has a single opportunity to edit the journal.”

“This is your opportunity to choose a Race or exchange a Talent.”

Chapter 9

3# Race Selection, Orc

At that moment, Noguduk raised his hand with an obstinate face.

“Look here. It’s all good. Everything is fine, but why am I here? Please explain this to me. I have no idea why I was dragged here. I’ve heard that you brought all these kids here, so shouldn’t you know why I’m here? I want to return to the place I used to live. I only want to go through these life and death experience once.”

“Uncle...”

As if she hadn’t expected Noguduk’s sudden outburst, Shinsoyool’s large clear eyes were filled with misery. She looked like a doe, who was abandoned by her mother, and his heart shook a bit. However, he instantly righted his mind, and he firmed his heart.

“I’m sorry. It isn’t like I don’t like you guys, but look at me. You guys are in the prime of your life, so you can fly around. However, I’m about to be 50 years old soon. Could my body survive here? I almost died not too long ago. If I return, I have a job and I can live a peaceful life. How can I give all of that up? I, I can’t....”

It was only for a brief amount of time, but they had shared both joy and sorrow. He felt like he was forsaking them, so he couldn’t finish the sentence. However, unlike his inner thoughts, the others made an expression of understanding. Kim-kyushik, who was close by, let out a hearty heart and he pounded Noguduk’s shoulder.

“Hahaha. We all understand, uncle. Even I would do the same.”

“Yes, thank you.”

He seemed to be a delinquent when they first met, but his true character seemed ok. He was just a bit simple. Yoon-hweeji, Hwang-gijoin, and Ahn-haemi also said similar words.

“...it can’t be helped. Uncle didn’t come here by your own choice.”

Shinsoyool kept sighing as if there a lot left to be desired. This Miss had already gone through several hardships with him, and she must have formed an attachment to Noguduk. She had a hard time letting go of the hands she was grasping. Maybe the life debt she had incurred towards Noguduk had a big influence on her.

He started getting ready to depart, and he said his goodbyes. However, he heard a sound that made him taste vinegar.(TLN: turned it sour)

“Aren’t you drinking too much kimchi-soup beforehand?(TLN: the soup is the by-product of making the kimchi. Usually, you drink the soup after you eat the cabbage. Basically he is saying Noguduk skipped a step. He bypassed the main content and went straight to the conclusion) It hasn’t been verified that you could return. From what I know, once you come over to this world, you cannot go back.”

This spiteful voice came from Ha-taegyong. Afterwards, Yoon-hweenji carefully spoke with a bit of an awkward expression.

“I’m sorry to say this, but it’s impossible to return.”

Thud! His heart sank, and Noguduk glared toward Durian.

“I can’t go back! What is this bullshit! Why did you bring me here!”

“I have no idea. This is the first time I’ve experienced such an event. The only thing I can say is you can’t return. Empowering. That is to say, if you received a distinct journal number than it means you are fixed to Square.”

“Then what about you?”

He was offended by this useless man getting angry at him. Durian licked his lips, and he thought hard on whether he should keep or throw away Noguduk. The contents of Noguduk’s journal was well known to him. He had no talent or attribute. He was trash. Normally, even if one died, one wouldn’t be able to come here. However, this situation was a special case.

Durian came to a decision. He decided to be a little bit more generous.

“Why are you asking the obvious? Scouters do not have serial numbers, so it is

possible. Only the Hunters can receive a serial number, when they are introduced into the record system. Even if you weren't Empowered, anyone who isn't a Scouter can't travel between dimensions. It isn't something I can change even as a Scouter. Maybe, the Committee might be able to."

"Committee?"

"They are nobles with very high stations. Even if you want to meet them, you aren't able to. If somehow you are able to meet them, they wouldn't waste massive amount of resource for just one person.... Well, are you worth that much? Of course not. Look here, Noguduk. Put your head on straight. You are old enough to know this. No matter how much you complain about the injustice, the higher ups don't care. I sympathize with your situation, but I can't do anything about it."

"Oooooook.... Ggoooooooo...." (TLN: ughhhhhhhh)

Noguduk sat limply on the floor. He had no words, so he moaned in frustration. Maybe he understood Durian's words in its entirety or he didn't have the strength to talk any more. Isn't the world run the same way no matter where he went?

He had lost his footing and his old body was thrown into the wild. What words could console him? The surrounding party members had faces filled with compassion, but they couldn't rashly step forward. They knew of no words that could console Noguduk's feelings.

"Uncle....."

Shinsoyool, who was acquainted with him, tried to carefully open her mouth, but she couldn't immediately think of what to say. She opened and closed her mouth several times before she firmly shut her mouth.

"I'm fine. I'm fine...."

As if her feelings had been conveyed, Noguduk stood up as he waved one hand. One couldn't tell if it was sadness or anger, but his eyes were red as if he had cried his eyes out. As if he couldn't see what was in front of him, he blinked his eyes several times, and he spoke as if he wasn't affected.

"That's right. It can't be helped. I'll try to meet those people from the

Committee, and the only thing I can do is to hold on to their pant legs. I'm sorry for wasting your time. Please continue what you were about to do."

"Hmm. I wish you good luck."

Durian tilted his head as if he was a bit surprised, and he gave a half-hearted words of blessing.

"Then let us continue. Where was I? Ah, one can change one's ability or choose a different race. Yes. Truthfully, this system was made for the hunters who weren't nominated after the Draft, because of their lack of talent. Just think of it as a mechanism to improve one's aptitude as a hunter. "

"You all know how to look at your journal? The ability swap is limited to the Common level skills. For example, there is a hunter with talent in both swordsmanship and spearmanship. If he is going to use only a single weapon, then the person doesn't need two talents. In this case, if one chooses swordsmanship then one could switch the spearsmanship to strength or agility talent. This is your only chance. The talent that can be swapped is listed on the Catalog, so it is a good idea to look over it."

In fact, several people were already busy looking through the Catalog.

"The race selection is a double edged sword. The attribute, talent, *etc.* recorded in your journal can be mixed to form a specific race existing on Square. You won't become anything other than a humanoid, so you don't have to worry about that. Just think of it as an artificial body."

Yoon-hweeji raised her hand.

"What do you mean by being able to maintain our human form, while we switch our race? If it is artificial then is it like coating a membrane over one's body?"

"Haha. The common sense from the modern times is still leftover in you. Membrane over the entire body? We don't do such uncivilized act. We do it without even using a scalpel, so you have nothing to worry about. It is the same concept as how you guys travelled between dimensions. The body will be broken down into its base particles and it will reform. Except, the reconstruction will differ a little bit. So the first question ..."

"Square has a lot of race that is similar to humans. We all live together, while

getting along or quarreling. Just think of it as different ethnicity. It is like being yellow, white or black people.(TLN: its a literal translation. If you have a problem with it let me know. I can change it.) Excluding several races, they can also procreate with each other. Therefore, there are a lot of mixed bloods. You have to be cautious in the fact that once you select your race you cannot change it again. Even if you pick a race from the Catalog, it would be impossible for you to change into it if the system deems it impossible. For example, Kim-gyushik can't change into an elf. They are a slim race."

At that moment, Shinsoyool was looking at the elf race's appearance from the Catalog. She burst out laughing as if she had thought of something.

"Puhuuuuuu..... Puhoot!" (TLN: laughter)

"What, what is it? What's so funny?"

"No. It's nothing. I imagined big brother Gyushik as an elf, and it was too funny.... Pu-hoo-hup!"

Eventually, several others were able to see the Elf listed on the Catalog. They all grabbed their stomachs and laughed. It was difficult for Kim-gyushik to get mad at her, so he let out a small cough. Then he started to flip through the innocent Catalog in agitation.

"Well, the explanation is over. Has anyone decided if you will go through the Race selection or Talent Exchange?"

"Me."

"I want to select a different race."

Before Durian could finish his words, two people raised their hand. Ahn-haemi and Hwang-gijong blankly looked at each other, and they made an awkward expression. Hwang-gijong quietly put down the hand he raised, and he nodded for Ahn-haemi to go first.

"Thank you."

Ahn-haemi bowed her head slightly as she replied. Durian, who was looking on with an amused expression, spoke.

"I want to do both. I want to change my talent and select a race. The talent..."

(TLN: his explanation made it sound like one had to choose either race selection or talent swap. I guess you can choose to do both.)

“Ah ah. I’ll hear that later. This isn’t something we should speak in public. Just tell me the race you want.”

If it wasn’t for Durian, she might have told everyone her info. Ahn-haemi felt relieved as she reproached herself.

“I want to change into a Dark elf.”

“Let me see. Your aptitude is great. That’s good. However, as a Dark elf, you will receive penalties related to items with ties to Spirits and strength. Instead....”

“I will be able to see clearly in the night, and my body movement will be more swift. I’ll also receive an additional adjustments inside forests. I’ve read the description from the Catalog. I also understand the fact that it is a double edged sword. Please make me a Dark elf.”

Ahn-haemi wasn’t going to go back on her decision, so she spoke clearly and closed her eyes. She wasn’t able to have a big impact on this draft. It might have been a case where she was unlucky. It was difficult to see in the Bone Tower, and it was the worst environment for an archer. From this perspective, Ahn-haemi’s choice was logical. One of the special attribute of the Dark Elf race was Night Vision. It was a way to overcome the limitation she had experienced in the test.

“Hmm. I hope you are ready. Then how about you?”

“I want to become a Wood elf.”

Hwang-gijong chose the Wood elf race, and it was a race that specialized in the magic of the forest. He had some aptitude towards magic, but he wasn’t exceptional at it. He had placed last in this draft. He had been exhausted after using only a single charged incantation. If he compared his talent to Yoon-hweeji or Che-nayun, it would be embarrassing.

Therefore, he decided on a specialization. Wood elves had a lot of shortcomings, but the race’s best attributes were well defined. Hwang-gijong thought he could remedy his shortcomings with the Forest magic, which received a race adjustment. He liked that the Wood elves had a lot of incantations related to life

and healing.

“Wood elf. I guess your compatibility isn’t too bad. It is possible. Who’s next?”

Afterwards, no one raised their hand. Even Hwang-gijong and Ahn-haemi, who chose to change race, looked at each with mixed emotion. They didn’t regret their decision, but in the end, they will shed their human form. Durian said they need not worry, but the actual person directly involved had differing feelings.

“I guess there aren’t anyone else. Then please stay here and rest. Currently, there are numerous clubs looking over your grades, and they are punching their calculators.”

“Wait! I! I want to do it. I want to do the race selection.”

It was Noguduk. Durian was about to leave his seat. His eyebrows twitched before he moved his half turned body back into its original position.

“Speak. I say this by way of caution, you won’t be able to choose the Elf race.”

“Orc. I want to be an orc, so please change me.”

Orc? Durian couldn’t believe what he had just heard, so he asked again.

“What did you say?”

“Ah, I want to choose the Orc race.”

It wasn’t only Durian, who couldn’t believe Noguduk’s explosive statement. The other people crowded around the Catalog to look for the Orc race and they swallowed a feigned laugh.

“Ehhhk? Uncle! What are you saying! Do you know what orcs are?”

“Of course. I decided after looking at the Catalog. Do you think I didn’t look at it?”

“It’s entirely a monster. A monster! Didn’t you watch the Lord of the Rings? Their faces are completely smashed. Can you really live your entire life looking like that?”

The sound of the shouts were very loud.

“What are you talking about, little girl? I’ve also seen the movie. Do you think I’m crazy? I don’t want to live looking like that. Look at the Catalog. It is different

here. This isn't a movie."

Noguduk pushed the Catalog towards Shinsoyool. She saw it, but she still said the same thing.

"It's still weird. Their fangs are too elongated and the skin color is green. They look scary."

"Read the description very carefully. If their fangs are protruding like that all the time then wouldn't it be difficult for them to live with it? It says they can control the length, and it depends on their emotional state. They look very manly and dependable to me. Am I in a situation where I can complain about being handsome or not? First, I have to survive, so I can go meet the Committee."

"...I guess so."

Everyone in the party knew that Noguduk didn't have any Talent or Attribute. It could be argued that there wasn't anyone here who was in more of a desperate situation. Moreover, it was a decision he came up with after thinking about it for a long time. Shinsoyool hadn't thought about his situation from his perspective. She had butted in needlessly, and she was sorry. However, she had to tell him one thing.

Noguduk hadn't still realized what she was thinking, so he was still trying hard to justify his choice of becoming an orc.

"Here here. I know orcs don't look too good, but it isn't that bad of a choice. Orcs are vulnerable to mental attacks, but their skin is tough and resilient. Also, they are fundamentally inclined toward physical strength."

"Uncle."

"Also.... Huh?"

"I respect uncle's choice. However, you can't turn back once you make the selection. Are you going to return to your home looking like that?"

"....."

She hit the nail on the head. Noguduk, who was busily explaining, stopped speaking, and his stern eyes rolled back and forth. He looked between the drawn figure of an orc inside the Catalog and Shinsoyool's resolute face. He was in

midst of a severe inner conflict.

He was wondering if he should increase his survival rate by becoming an orc or live as a human, which had a higher chance of dying. He agonized over the decision for a short time.

“It’ll work out somehow. It is important for me to stay alive right now. I’ll even wear this outer appearance.”

“Sigh.... Do as you please.”

He was already upset yet Shinsoyool was letting out a deep sigh. He hated her at that moment. Moreover, she even started to shake her head. Noguduk, who was already frustrated, couldn’t hold back, and he lashed out in anger.

“Look here you little girl! Are you my wife! I’m asking you if you are my wife? Why are you nagging at me from my side!”

She was surprised at the thunder-like roar. Shinsoyool was dazed for a moment before her face started to tear up. She looked like she was in an emotional state where a slight nudge could set off her tears.

As if Noguduk was sorry for his outburst, he turned his head, while he cleared his throat. As the situation devolved, the others were having fun viewing the situation, but they also became embarrassed. Eventually, Yoon-hweeji couldn’t win against the silent pressure(TLN: the others were pressuring her to say something), so she stepped forward as if she had been pushed.

“Soyool spoke, while thinking about Mr. Noguduk, so why are you getting angry at her?”

“Kuh-hmm, Kuh-hhhhhmmmm. That is....” (TLN: he cleared his throat twice.)

Noguduk couldn’t come up with an excuse, so his words trailed off. How did he get into a verbal fight with a girl, who is of similar age as his daughter? He thought he was pathetic.

“It’s ok, big sister.”

“Soyool, you should.... Huh?”

Yoon-hweeji, who was consoling Shinsoyool, flinched back at her sharp voice. Shinsoyool had escaped from Yoon-hweeji’s arms, and she opened were eyes

wide, which still held some tears. She glared at Noguduk, who was trying hard to avoid her gaze.

“Uncle.”

“I, I... I’m sorry. However, you were also in the wrong...”

“Don’t call me a little girl.” (TLN: 계집애 = can be a rude term for a young girl or little girl.)

“...ok. I understand.”

“Don’t you ever swear at me.”

“O, okay.”

He retreated with his tails between his legs. Shinsoyool, who glared at him like a wild cat, walked out of the hall. When the sounds of her steps couldn’t be heard, he was able to straighten his back out of a slouch. Then he mumbled towards his companions, who were giving him a strange look.

“What am I doing with someone, who is of my daughter’s age? Jeez.”

“Soyool is too kind hearted. Maybe she thought of Mr. Noguduk as a father figure, and she wanted to lean against you.”

“Once we get designated, we’ll all go our own way so why....”

He replied back in a blunt manner, but Noguduk didn’t show signs of being angry.

‘I guess everyone has their own story. If they led a normal life and living well, then why would they come to this place? Also, why did this woman come here?’ (TLN: he is wondering why a successful actress is willing to come to a dangerous world)

For a moment, he thought of a question pertaining to Yoon-hweeji. However, it wasn’t the time to be concerned about such things.

“...since it’s like that, please make me an orc.”

“If you took a little bit more time then I was about leave. Any ways, your request have been accepted. Your aptitude is fine. Well, since we’ve completed what was needed to be done, let us rest. The list of your offers will probably

come in tomorrow. Nevertheless, you guys joined the draft at the same time, so if there are any unsaid words, you better say it today.”

Durian spoke these meaningful words before he shut the door.

“You might not be able to see each other tomorrow.”

Chapter 10

3#Race Selection, Orc

On that night, Durian visited several people in their rooms. He visited Ahn-haemi's room to talk about the Skill Exchange. Next, he visited Kim-jungin's room.....

“...an offer came in?”

“The number one ranked from each group automatically receives an offer. The offer came from the Lunatics. For the past dozens of years, they have been an elite team that has never been demoted from the Prime League. As a Hunter, they have accomplished many legendary achievements. However, they didn't score well this time around, so they received a high pick.”

After the Draft ends, there is a 7 day window called the Pick up period. The clubs with the draft rights pick the future prospects, in order of who had the higher pick. Then they negotiate for a day. As the day passes, the amount of prospects will decrease as they make contracts with the clubs. Those who fail to make contract with a club would be left over. Afterwards, the events of the first day would repeat. The filtering continues for 7 days, and only the bad crops would be left over.

Durian secretly studied Kim-jungin's expression. He wanted Kim-jungin to stay independent for now. However, he was in a position where he couldn't explicitly let his wishes be known. If he showed signs of having some other plan, he would incur the other's suspicion.

“If it's the Lunatics, this is a pretty rare opportunity. However, this is business. There is a chance that there will be a better offer. During the first day, there are a lot of big clubs with low picks, who don't choose a prospect. They are waiting for the contract between the clubs with the high pick and the prospect to fail. There are usually shrewd newcomers, who take advantage of this. There are cases where it takes 5 to 6 days for them to sign to a big club. Of course, this is only possible for those who have the skills to back them up.” (TLN: if a club has a

high pick then there is a high chance the team is terrible. Some prospects intentionally sabotage their contract negotiation, so they could be picked by a more successful club. Being picked means they get the first crack at signing you to a contract.)

“Still, you don’t want to delay it too much. The clubs have to immediately bolster their roster, so they can’t fixate on one person. If one is too picky, and one doesn’t get picked after the 7th day then it is common to see people signed to a very cheap contract. You have to pay attention closely. The contractor for the Lunatics will be here tomorrow.”

“I don’t want to join any clubs.”

“Yes. I’m sure you will make the right decision.... Huh? You want to reject being chosen? Why?”

This had already happened twice. He guessed he picked his ears too often today.(TLN: it’s a idiom) Durian welcomed it inside his heart, but he was worried about Kim-jungin’s undecipherable intention. These are the words he wanted to hear, but if their goals differed, then it would be a moot point.

Kim-jungin spoke with a calm expression.

“I have something to say beforehand.”

“Hmm. You have something to say? Feel free to say it.”

“Before Mr. Noguduk came to the ready room, he said he was hit by a car.”

“...is that so?”

He kept a peaceful outer appearance, but Durian’s lips shook intermittently. Kim-jungin’s sharp eyes didn’t miss this fact. He spoke with added conviction.

“On that day, I don’t have any memory after my seizure. When I woke up, I was in the ready room.”

“And your terminal illness is gone. Shouldn’t that be the bottom line?”

Kim-jungin and Durian. Their gazes intermingled as they tried to see what the other was thinking. No. The two already knew what the other’s intention was. Kim-jungin wanted to hear a straight answer, and Durian was purposefully redirecting the conversation.

Click. Click. Suddenly, Kim-jungin's finger tapped twice on the table. It was a habit that showed up when he revealed his true feelings.

"No. I am responsible for Mr. Noguduk getting involved in this affair. I'm also thinking assuming the responsibility."

Durian's forehead wrinkled deeply. He knew Kim-jungin had a inflexible personality, and his ominous prediction came to pass. If he made a slight mistake here, the treasure in front of his eyes would be taken by some other person. He had to prevent this from happening.

"If I told you, you didn't have anything to do with Noguduk's incident, would you believe me?"

"I would not believe it except I'll be disappointed in Mr. Durian."

"You are very sure of yourself."

"It is the truth."

Both of them hadn't back off an inch up until this point, but the person with the knife was clearly Kim-jungin.(TLN: Kim-jungin has the upper hand) Moreover, Kim-jungin wasn't an idiot, who could be controlled easily. For a moment, Durian thought about adopting a hard line on the subject, but he eventually decided on a different route.

"So what do you want to do? Do you want to follow him your whole life, and take care of his affairs?"

"At the very least, I want to help him until he secures a spot for himself. During that time, I can be his shade." (TLN: shelter)

"Huh, a shade? Aren't you a newcomer who recently came to Square? Aren't you overestimating your own capabilities?"

"It is a possibility. However, I think it is possible if Mr. Durian also helps."

".....!"

At that moment, Durian came to a realization. The scale had already shifted away from him a long time ago.

"You.. you knew about it? When did you find out?"

“It was when you were unusually preferential in treating me. I realized it at that moment. It was proof that you have a high valuation of me. If I was a prospect you were just going to hand over, then you wouldn’t have accepted such unreasonable requests.”

Even the acts he performed, which exceeded his authority, was found out. Durian was lost for words, so he could only chuckle. He(TLN:Kim-jungin) was smart. Durian felt a sense of defeat at his words, but he sincerely wanted to praise him. Still, it felt uncomfortable. His shallow tactics were seen through entirely, and he felt a sense of defeat.

Durian, who was an experienced Scouter, had to admit he had underestimated Kim-jungin.

“Even though I’m hearing this from a new recruit, it doesn’t feel too bad. Alright, I’ll admit it. You won. Since you’ve left me defenseless, there must be a deal you want to propose? Tell me. I’ll try to hear you out. What do I have to do in order for me to exclusively work with you?”

It was clean declaration of defeat. As if he had been waiting for it, Kim-jungin spoke.

“After the pick-up period has ended, I want you to represent my comrades who didn’t get picked.”

When he was on earth, he had closely observed Kim-jungin. Durian already had a general idea what the request was. It was within his predicted expectation.

“Of course, you want to group together with them? Jeez, is this some kind of a package deal? Ok. I’ll allow it.”

“One year. I won’t make a contract with other clubs for 1 year.”

“Are you saying you want to grow your skills during this one year span? I guess it is possible for you, but I’m not so sure about the others. It would be better to gain experience in a club. Well, it’s all good. Next?”

“Please teach me swordsmanship. If it is possible, I want you to look out for the other members with the exclusive contract. The last one isn’t a condition, but a request.”

Durian stroked his chin and he thought about it for a moment. He had decided what he was going to do, but since he had bowed his head to Kim-jungin, he wanted, at the very least, to save his own face. On the other hand, he was once again impressed by Kim-jungin's memory and intuition.

'When we met for the first time, that was the only time I wore my sword. He remembered that.'

"You basically want to make me a nanny. I'll do it. However, don't use the word like request. I'm not able to refuse you anyways. Is that the last condition?"

"Yes."

"Then let me tell you my conditions. The contract length will be 5 years. As long as the contract is valid, you will have to do your best to follow my words. I'm not saying I'll order you around. I want you to respect my opinions."

Five years was the maximum amount one can legally sign. Kim-jungin passively nodded his head, but he couldn't help but comment on it.

"The contract length is longer than I expected."

"I changed my mind. You are going to work me hard, so I can't let you go after 1 year. In about three years, it would be enough time for your hidden potential to explode. The other two years of contract time for a super rookie would be akin to a blank check for me. If I had my way, I would want to extend your contract around the 2nd year and I would sell it at the maximum price. However, if I did that then you would cuss me out."

Kim-jungin would have sharply rejected any talks of an extension. Kim-jungin agreed to the conditions, while smiling bitterly.

After the two agreed to the terms of the contract, the contract was written up immediately. The journal had a signature function, so a contract written through the journal could be authenticated by the System. There could be no forged contracts. This allowed one to change from a Scouter to a Hunter's agent, and the other to change from a prospect to a Hunter with a personal agent. There were no contract fees, and those contracted including Durian was like a club. The compensation were distributed by how much one contributed to the result.

The deal was satisfactory to both party, and they firmly clasped their hands instead of exchanging pleasantries.

The 7 days passed faster than expected. As the time passed, the crowded hall milling with people started decreasing one by one.

The first one to be picked was Ha-taegyong. He received an offer from a mid-tier club called the Lionel. He disappeared without even saying goodbye. They realized what had happened when he didn't show up for a while. Kim-gyushik complained that he contemptible until the end, and he complained that his appetite was gone. However, at that moment, Durian told him that he had received an offer. He unnecessarily became embarrassed, and he just scratched the back of his head. His offer came from the Underdog. This was how Kim-gyushik also left.

Afterwards, Lee-junghwan, Che-nayun and Ahn-haemi received offers. Durian didn't seem to care if they left or not. He only spoke to Ahn-haemi before she left through the Warp gate. She was told once she arrived at the destination through the Warp, the Update(Race, Talent) will be applied. He just warned her about it and that was it. Finally, the last day came and only Kim-jungin, Yoon-hweeji, Shin-soyool, Noguduk, and Hwang-gijun was left in the hall.

Noguduk wasn't expecting any offer, so he chewed on a biscuit with an easygoing expression. He sneaked a glance towards the front. Coincidentally, his eyes squarely met Yoon-hwiji's gaze. He wanted to brush it off as if it was a mistake, but Yoon-hweeji wasn't inclined to let it go. Her personality was unexpectedly very stubborn.

"What is wrong? Mr. Noguduk."

Noguduk cringed, and he fidgeted with the innocent biscuit basket. He had become acquainted with her during the pickup period, but he still had a hard time talking to her, since she was a famous celebrity.

"Nothing much. It's just strange."

"What is?"

"It isn't just you, but him also. You guys aren't people who should be leftover. Today is the last day.... You guys don't look like you are weighing your options."

You, him, her. Noguduk pointed at Yoon-hweeji, Kim-jungin and Shin-soyool in order. If one was comparing one club to another on the last day, one shouldn't be so relaxed. They should be filled with half anticipation, and half disappointment at waiting for a club official to visit them.

Of course, it should be like that, but Noguduk didn't see anyone who was anxious. This made the situation all the more weird. They were lazing around as if they had already picked where they would like to go yet it was the last day of the draft. After the draft, it would basically be like hammering your head against the bare floor. (TLN: if you aren't pick, future prospect is block *i.e.* hitting your head against the floor) If one was of sound mind then one wouldn't choose this route.

"Ah ha. So you were curious."

As if she understood what he was saying, Yoon-hweeji let out a small sigh then she looked toward a direction, while smiling.

"Mr Kim-Jungin? May we just tell him?"

"I guess so. Miss Yoon-hweeji should explain."

After thinking for a moment, Kim-jungin readily nodded his head. Was he happy about delegating the responsibility? Yoon-hweeji's beautiful face made a smile, which had the effect of making others feel better. She slowly raised her rear from the chair.

"I'm going to make an exclusive contract with Mr. Durian. I'm going to follow Mr. Kim-jungin."

"Huh? What are you saying? Aren't contracts only made with clubs?"

Noguduk search for Durian with an odd look in his eyes. However, he had already left his seat, so he was nowhere to be seen.

"Mr. Durian can also double as an agent. An agent can act as a Hunter's representative. They can negotiate a contract with a club or they can manage an unaffiliated Hunter. Therefore, Mr Durian will manage us during the time we have a contract with him."

"Hmmm. So this was what big sister was talking about."

Before he knew it, Shin-soyool had approached him. She listened attentively. Noguduk looked down at her with eyes filled with exasperation.

“What? You already knew?”

“Well, I didn’t know the exact details. I just didn’t want to be separated from the people here, so I did consult with big sister. Big sister only gave me some hints.

“Hints?”

“She just said stay here and don’t do anything.”

This was why she had remained after refusing all the offers. Hwang-gijong was looking around dumbfounded, so it seemed only Kim-jungin and Yoon-hweeji knew about this. It was too much of an uncertain situation to get mad, so Noguduk closed his mouth.

“Don’t be too disappointed. Initially, Mr. Kim-jungin wanted to keep it a secret until the end. That man is too much, right?”

Noguduk looked at him. Behind the shoulder of the smiling Yoon-hweeji, Kim-jungin shuddered imperceptibly. What had happened? No, if Kim-jungin wanted to keep this to himself then how did Yoon-hweeji find out? There were a lot of questions he wanted to ask, but Noguduk decided to quietly bury those questions. He would just roll with it.

“Basically, anyone here who haven’t received an offer during the pickup period can make an exclusive contract with Mr. Durian. Kim-jungin has already signed his contract. The length of the contract was fixed at 5 years, and he won’t be able to receive an offer from any club for 1 year. This means there won’t be any contract free. Like the draft, the compensation will be performance based. At the very least, there will be a minimum compensation, but this isn’t guaranteed if one doesn’t accomplish anything for a long period of time.”

“Ah, one more thing. Durian isn’t only our agent during the duration of our contract, but he will also be our instructor. He has a lot of experience, so he’ll be of great help in increasing our skills. Of course, he’ll join us in live battles.”

“So you are basically saying this a small club made out of contractors.”

Hwang-gijong accurately summarized the situation. Yoon-hweeji clapped her hands as she agreed.

“Yes. Today is the last day of the pick-up period. Now the choice is up to you. What are you going to do?”

Before she could finish her words, Shin-soyool quickly raised her hand.

“Me! I want to do it! Uncle, why aren’t you raising your hand? Do you want to be leftover by yourself?”

Noguduk thought about joining in, but he hesitated.

“No, I... I’ll just get in the way... Will I be able to pull my own weight?”

“How can you say that? Did you choose to become an orc with that resolve?”

Shin-soyool’s eyes was looking at him as if to say, ‘Isn’t that right?’, and Yoon-hweeji slowly nodded her head.

“Yes. If your skill is lacking then we can grow it. There is a deferment period of one year. We are all in the same boat. Aren’t we all newbies?”

“....thank you.”

This sealed Noguduk’s cooperation. The only one left was Hwang-gijong, who had been a walking corpse without any confidence during the last 7 days. Everyone thought Hwang-gijong would definitely accept the contract, but he calmly revealed his refusal.

“I’m thankful for your goodwill. However, I’m going to leave on my own. I have something I want to do. This was why I wanted to become a hunter in the first place.”

“What? Big brother Gijong, why? Come with us. Please?”

Shin-soyool looked at him with wide eyes, and she turned on her charms. Hwang-gijong could only laugh, but he didn’t seem like he would go back on his decision. Yoon-hweeji and Noguduk also felt sad at his refusal, but they didn’t want to dig too much into a personal matter.

Like Ha-taegyong, Hwang-gijong left by himself the next morning. His room was organized as if no one had stayed there. They didn’t know what his situation

was, but they wished him well on his future journey. Then they let go of any lingering attachment.

In the end, there were four people left. Kim-jungin, Yoon-hweeji, Shin-soyool and Noguduk. Durian came into the draft hall to wrap things up. He had expected only one or two extra person, so he frowned when he saw three extra members. However, he couldn't go back on his words.

They were tied together by an odd contract relationship, and the club with 5 members was formed.

"The minimum number of members need to form a club is Double squared or 20 people. In this case, we are just a Party."

"Eh-he. I don't really care what we are called. So where are we going next?"

Shin-soyool asked in an excited voice. Durian looked at her with an unpleasant gaze, and he replied in a tired voice.

"We are going to Cradle town. That place will be sufficient for our first destination."